

GUIDE TO STAR-WATCHING, OKLAHOMA STYLE

OKLAHOMA TODAY

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THE RETURN OF THE WILD HORSE

MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR





OKLAHOMA TODAY

July-August 1991

Vol. 41, No. 4

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After a century, wild horses have returned to the bluestem prairies near Bartlesville. How long can they stay this time? *By Burkhard Bilger*

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COVER: Wild horses at the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge. Photograph by Dave Crenshaw. **Inside front cover:** Sailing on Grand Lake. Photograph by Jim Argo. **Back cover:** Wichita Mountains after a rain. Photograph by Steve Wilson.



Today In Oklahoma

As this issue began to take shape a year ago, I found our editorial team kept circling back to the love-hate relationship Oklahomans seem to have with our famous end-of-summer heat: We want to be outdoors in July and August. But, once outside, we gravitate to shade. Or water.

What seemed to be in order was an issue that would give travelers a reason to get outside, but at the same time enable them to outfox the heat.

We put our heads together—and watched the lineup grow: Burkhard Bilger's story on the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge lets you walk on Oklahoma's wild side without leaving your air-conditioned car; Maura McDermott's tome on the celestial wonders of our night skies puts you outdoors in the cooler hours of evening. As for associate editor Barbara Palmer's story on an old-fashioned hardware store in the lake town of Eufaula, let's just say you can feel the ceiling fans whirring with a sultriness you haven't experienced since "Casablanca."

Ultimately, it is our hope that reading this issue will approach the wonderful sensation of downing an ice-cold bottle of pop after a hot, sweaty game of softball. It is, after all, a matter of synergism: Neither the cold pop nor the hot softball game would be as good without the other. So it is with August heat. It's what separates the true Oklahoman from the wannabes.

Last summer, however, I had no idea just how *hot* Oklahoma would be this summer. And I'm not *just* talking mercury readings. It is May as I write this and for the last few weeks I haven't been able to pick up a national maga-

zine without seeing some mention of Oklahoma. In *Metropolitan Home*, I read that my mother's set of sturdy brown Frankoma mugs and pitcher may be among the next wave of hot American collectibles. In *Reader's Digest*, I read that Tulsa has done an ingenious job of reclaiming land laid waste by freeways. And in *Vanity Fair*, I read the homespun wisdom of Oklahoma's favorite son, Will Rogers, is enjoying a revival on the Broadway stage, through a new Tommy Tune musical, "Will Rogers



The Ziegfeld Girls: Rebecca is second from right on the top row.

Follies." (I get a personal kick out of the fact that Tune, who is part Shawnee, grew up spending summers on his grandmother's farm in Oklahoma and is said to have choreographed his first dance numbers

in her cornfield.)

If all that, plus the six Tony awards "Follies" won this summer, weren't enough to make Oklahoma chests swell, the success of one of our own should be: One of the sixteen Ziegfeld Girls in Tune's Broadway hit is Rebecca Downing, a product of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma City University. "It's what I prayed for, prepared for, and crossed my fingers for," admits the 29-year-old mezzo-soprano, who isn't so star-struck she can't see the irony in her Broadway debut being in an Oklahoma show.

"I've known about Will Rogers since school," says Rebecca, "but I've gotten to know him on a personal level doing this show... it always interweaves his upbringing and the values he grew up with in Oklahoma and how that made him the man he was.

"The show reminds me of the greatness and the power of Oklahoma, and it's really nice to touch home again."

Here, here. —Jeanne M. Devlin

OKLAHOMA TODAY

David Walters, Governor



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Shawnee Puts Up The Largest Rodeo In The World

Hosting the National High School Finals Rodeo in Shawnee (pop. 26,506) is not unlike inviting 1,350 people over to the house for a week and suggesting they each bring a horse and a cow. "The first thing is the mass numbers of people and livestock and how to feed them," admits Ken Etchieson, director for The Heart of Oklahoma Exposition Center in Shawnee. (It takes 8-10,000 bales of hay just to feed the livestock.)

The next thing, is getting everyone a bed for the night.

At the fairgrounds, the horses sleep fine. The Exposition Center built 1,350 new box stalls to house its four-footed guests. (The 2,000 visiting head of cattle camp outside.)

Back in town, the teen-aged contestants and their families do okay, too. Oklahoma Baptist University and St. Gregory's College both open their dorms to house the young cowboys and cowgirls, and area motels and Shawnee homes take care of the rest. "All in all, we take them in like company for the week,"

says Etchieson, earnestly.

With 1,350 contestants, the National High School Finals Rodeo is billed as the

FRED W. MARVEL



NHSFR events run the gamut, from girls' barrel racing to bull riding.

largest rodeo in the world. It also serves as an unofficial farm team for the professional rodeo circuit. The late Lane Frost of Lane was a NHSFR bull riding champion before he went on to win the same Professional Rodeo Cowboy

Association title. More recently, Ty Murray of Stephenville, Texas, won the PRCA's all-round buckle the year after winning the same title at the NHSFR. But the pageantry of the NHSFR alone would make it unique. On opening day, as contestants carry their state's flags through the arena for the grand entry, different contingents in the grandstand go

to whooping, hollering, and ringing cowbells. "You don't see that at most rodeos," says Etchieson, proudly.

Once under way, the rodeo is, literally, a three-ring circus. "We Oklahomans go to rodeos all the time," Etchieson observes, "but to see something of this magnitude,

with three arenas going at the same time, is unparalleled anywhere else."

Shawnee hosts the NHSFR July 21 through July 28, and again next summer. For more information, call Ken Etchieson at (405) 275-7020.

Frankoma: The Next Hot Collectible?

Frankoma Pottery is as Oklahoman as Waterford Crystal is Irish.

The difference?

Heck, we eat lunch off mom's antique Wagon Wheel Dinner Plates.

But times they may be a changing.

In the May issue of *Metropolitan Home* magazine, Tiffany design director John Loring pauses during a ramble of New York City flea markets to remark that "humble Frankoma pottery is one of my favorite" new collectibles, because its "best pieces are wonderfully eccentric" and presently inexpensive.

With that said, the creative force behind many of the artful objects made for Tiffany's each year plopped down \$22 for two Frankoma pieces made in the late Forties.

Neither the high praise nor the purchase surprise Joniece Frank, the daughter of John Frank who founded Frankoma (FRANK, OklahOMA) Pottery in Sapulpa in February of 1938.

Three books have been written on Frankoma as a collectible, and Phyllis and Tom Bess' book "Frankoma Treasures" recently went into a second printing. Meanwhile prices for the

BUDDY MANGINE



Frankoma: red clay bodies, post-deco shapes.

"humble" pottery, made from clay dug near the Sapulpa plant, have soared. "It's not unusual for prices to be in the hundreds of dollars for pieces dated before our 1938 fire," says Ms. Frank.

Another sign of its new popularity: Counterfeit pieces now exist.

These days, Ms. Frank says even she would be excited to find a Frankoma piece dated 1938. In November of that year, just nine months after opening for business, the Frankoma plant burned to the ground, destroying her father's original molds. New models were recast from existing pieces of pottery, but the procedure resulted in pieces that are 10 percent larger than the originals.

"Frankie in back recently picked up one at a flea market," she confides. "He paid 50 cents for it. But I knew when I saw it what it was. And on the open market it could go for over a hundred dollars."

You're holding the Regional Magazine of the Year!

Oklahoma Today—we were thrilled to learn—was named the “Magazine of the Year” at the 1991 Regional Publishers Association’s national conference in Kerrville, Texas. With that honor, the magazine’s name was added to a trophy bearing the names of such outstanding regional magazines as *Arizona Highways* and *Yankee*.

In addition to that award, presented for overall excellence, *Oklahoma Today* received six other awards for writing, design, and photography.

Those awards include: a gold award for “Saving the Trees: A Growing Movement is Keeping Oklahoma Green,” by Burkhard Bilger, published September-October 1990; a silver award for overall design; and two silver awards for the Indian art special issue published in November-December 1990. The magazine also won awards of merit for a photo essay shot in the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Osage County by Pawhuska photographer Harvey Payne and written by magazine Managing Editor Jeanne M. Devlin, from the July-August 1990 issue; and a historical column about a car manufactured in Enid in the 1910s, written and photographed by M. Scott Carter and published in the January-February 1990 issue.

Contest judges were Abe Peck, who has worked as an editor and writer for *Rolling Stone* and *Outside* magazines; Terri Brooks, a contributor to such magazines as *Harper's*, *Working Woman*, and *Redbook*; and Dennis Darling, a photographer and designer whose work has appeared in

Vogue, *Texas Monthly*, and *Fortune* magazines.



Also this spring, *Oklahoma Today* awarded its first annual writer and photographer awards. Ralph Marsh, a frequent contributor from Heavener, was named “1990 Writer of the Year.” Marsh often writes about southeastern Oklahoma and his affection for that part of the state is evident in his stories.

Oklahoma City photographer David Fitzgerald, who is equally gifted at photographing both landscapes and

LAURA YOUNG



Ralph Marsh

people, was named “1990 Photographer of the Year.” Not coincidentally, both Marsh and Fitzgerald were major contributors in the issues we submitted for judging in the RPA contest.

In making the RPA awards, the judges had a lot of nice things to say about the magazine and about the art direction provided by Stroud Design, Inc. But one comment in particular pleased us. A judge wrote: “I’m sure your readers look forward to every issue.” We sincerely hope that is true.

JOHN JERNIGAN



David Fitzgerald

Letters

Your ability to capture the flavor, history, and natural beauty of our great state is unsurpassed. I have been a lifelong resident of Oklahoma, and now that business has moved me to another state, I will depend on *Oklahoma Today* more than ever. I learn about and love this place more with each passing issue.

Jim Newport
Jonesboro, Louisiana

I have been an “Okie” for 62 years, and I am beginning my fourth year in Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer. It’s

always exciting to receive *Oklahoma Today*. I read every word, and especially liked articles about my Cherokee chief Wilma Mankiller (January-February 1990) and Carl Albert (September-October 1990). Your magazine brings “home” to me.

Patricia Goetz
Kenema, West Africa

Just wanted to let you know that the articles on the restaurants in Oklahoma are great. How many times have we traveled in the smaller towns in Oklahoma and wanted a good place to have a meal and usually ended up in a fast-food place because we didn’t know any place else to go. Keep up the good work.

J.D. Freeman
Oklahoma City

Reading “Chautauqua ’Til You Drop” (May-June 1991) brought many fond memories to me. I learned how to spell Chautauqua before I went to school—we lived on Chautauqua Avenue in Norman. As a child I went to every Chautauqua-style entertainment that came to the University of Oklahoma. I hope the Chautauqua will someday come to Texas.

Lucy Glee Fullington
Odessa, Texas

In the March issue, the photo on page 2 is identified as Robbers Cave State Park, it is Beavers Bend State Park. Also, the woman on page 34 is not Theresa Charles, but Ruth Klinekole of Dallas, Texas.

NEXT ISSUE: Tooling down an Oklahoma road in fall, the sky is brilliant blue, the leaves tantalizing as gold coins, and a drive to the local co-op resembles a fairytale trip. With that in mind, we take to the highways and even the sky to bring you the best of Oklahoma fall foliage in the September-October issue of *Oklahoma Today*.

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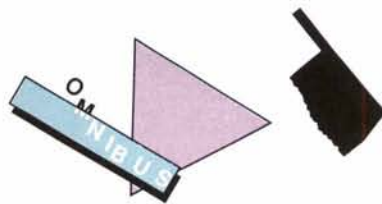
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**OKLAHOMA
TODAY**



That Oklahoma Wind

It was so-o-o windy...



*Maria blows the stars around
And sends the clouds a-flyin',
Maria makes the mountains sound
Like folks were up there dyin'.*

Maria... Maria...

They call the wind Maria.

—"They Call the Wind Maria"

Wind is part of the Oklahoma mystique. For better or for worse, we not only have more wind than just about anybody else, but what we have is also, well, windier.

Chicago may call itself the "Windy City," but at an average annual wind speed of 10 miles per hour, it dims in comparison to Oklahoma City (14 mph) or Boise City (15). Even genteel Tulsa clocks its average wind speed at 11 miles per hour. And then there are those Oklahoma gusts.

The strongest wind gust on record, says Channel 9 meteorologist Gary England, is 69 miles per hour. "But I know that's bull," he says, bluntly. "We've had winds associated with tornadoes we think reached 250 to 300 miles per hour. The reason we can't be sure, is that's so strong it would blow the measuring instruments away."

Spoken like a true Oklahoman.

No one appreciates a good windy story like an Oklahoman. And through the years, we've come up with some doozies. A favorite in the late 1930s involved a woman who put three chicks in a box and then placed a jug of warm water in the box to keep them warm. "The wind blew the top off the box, blew the water out of the jug, and when the woman went to look after the chicks she could not find them," John C. Talley told an Oklahoma Historical

Society interviewer in a 1937 interview. "She heard them chirping, and finally located them. The wind had blown them into the jug and she had to break the jug to get them out."

Wind in Oklahoma long ago entered the realm of folklore. But this is one case in which reality often rivals fiction. After Oklahoma chickens were repeatedly found featherless after encountering tornadic winds, one scientist decided to determine the wind velocity at which this happened by building a wind tunnel, strapping some unlucky chicken in it, and turning the fan up until his feathers blew off. "You know what," says Gary England, disappointedly, "they found if you scare a chicken enough, his feathers fall out."

Still no one disputes the ferocity of Oklahoma wind. Elmer Ellsworth Noah in another OHS interview observed, "In 1896 the wind began to blow with the fury of a hurricane and it continued day after day for weeks. One day the wind blew straight from the north and the next day just as hard from the south. There was no pause and all the vegetation blew off the fields, until the ground was bare."

According to humorist Richard McGuinn of Hallet, farmhouses once came with "crowbar holes" from which wind velocity could be tested. "If the crowbar merely bends when thrust out the hole," explained McGuinn, wryly, "it is safe to go out. If the bar is broken off, it is better to stay in."

We get more wind in Oklahoma because of our flat terrain, but also because of how wind happens. Air tends to flow toward lower pressure areas. Air also tends to rise and fall as the earth's surface heats and cools. If it is cool and

the pressure in Oklahoma City is higher than it is in hot Amarillo, air is going to flow to Amarillo causing wind. The bigger the difference in the temperatures and the bigger the difference in the pressure between the two locations, the stronger the wind.

In general, Oklahomans tend to oscillate on whether wind is a curse or a blessing. Wind almost blew away portions of this state in the 1930s. Yet, from the beginning it was the water pumped by windmills that made settlement of this land possible.

And so it has gone: farmers building wind breaks in an attempt to slow the wind, settlers digging caves in an attempt to escape it, engineers building wind turbines to generate electricity, pump oil, and power irrigation systems in an attempt to use the wind.

In the end, Oklahomans do seem to be happiest with the wind when there is at least a semblance of their being in control of it. Bergey Windpower Company in Norman is the world's largest maker of small wind turbines. Mike Bergey says it's not a coincidence his firm is here or that he's sold more than a hundred of the turbines (at \$20,000 a piece) to Oklahoma farmers. "You ask virtually any Oklahoman, and they'll say, 'I hate the wind,' but if you ask those who own their own wind generators, they can't wait for windy days," he says. "It's hard to come up with anything good about wind. It messes up your hair and takes laundry off the line and blows trash into the yard. But if you own your own wind generator, it makes you money."

And that may be the closest thing to a wind comeuppance we'll ever get.

—Jeanne M. Devlin

THE RETURN OF

A piece of the prairie has been turned



THE WILD HORSE

back to rumbling clouds of mustangs.

It may all be
just a dream

By Burkhard Bilger

A band of wild horses streaks across the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge near Bartlesville. The horses run for as long as two hours, seemingly for no other reason than the pure joy of it.



Don Kyler must spend a good quarter of his life on horseback. In the summer, Kyler wakes up at daybreak and rides out into the rolling tallgrass to look for work. There's an otherworldly magic to the prairie dawn, with Indian Blanket lifting and opening its blossoms and a lavender mist hanging in the hollows, but Kyler doesn't dwell on it. As a cowboy at the Hughes ranch, just west of Bartlesville, he has to watch over the bluestem, take care of livestock, and fix whatever's broken. "I just do what I have to do," he says. "A cowboy ought to know when he has to patch a fence. If he doesn't, he shouldn't be on the payroll." Gruff and practical, content with the steady, open-ended rhythm of his days, Kyler likes to work with the cattle, which seem to share his no-nonsense approach to the outdoors. But he's not so sure about these wild horses.

Two years ago, when part of the Hughes ranch became the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge, Kyler was put in charge of the new arrivals. "These horses are the most unpredictable things that I've ever seen," he says. "Barbed wire fences don't mean nothin' to them, they'll just run and keep on runnin'." He admires their spirit, sure, and the survival instinct that carried them through many a parched season back in Nevada. But he can't get too close to them. If he tries to ride up on horseback, they'll bolt in sudden panic, led by their top mare. If he wants to vaccinate one of them or check its hooves, he has to corral it into a horse trap and constrain it in a pen—1,200 pounds of raging, terrified animal snorting, eyes rolling, hooves half-an-inch-thick pounding against the siding. "I'm trying to get them used to me," he says, "but I don't think it's working. About all you can do with wild horses is watch them out there being themselves—and hope that they don't get loose."

To those of us who don't have to work with wild horses, just watching them is reward enough. In Oklahoma, you might even say it's a rare privilege: until the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge was founded, herds of wild horses (or mustangs, as many people call them) hadn't charged across this state's prairie in a hundred years. One of only two such sanctuaries in the country (the other one is in South Dakota), the refuge was created to accommodate up to 2,000 wild horses from the West, where mustang populations have grown too big for the land to feed them. Here, within thirty miles of the Tallgrass Prairie preserve, the horses feed on some of the nicest grass in the country, their hoofs are trimmed, and they never have to

walk more than a quarter of a mile to find water. "The horses think they've already died and gone to heaven," says ranch owner John Hughes.

Despite its benign purpose, however, the refuge is tangled in an old, bitter controversy. Some environmentalists think that wild horses are our grandest native animals; others believe that they don't belong in North America at all—that they take land away from true natives like deer, antelope, and elk. Animal rights activists believe that mustangs should be protected and allowed to multiply at any cost; most ranchers think they should be rigidly controlled. Until recently, the preservationists have won out, but the costs of protecting wild horses are piling up and dramatic

changes are brewing. The Prairie Wild Horse Refuge, meanwhile, exists in a limbo. Today, people going down Highway 123 on their way to Wollaroo can glimpse a perfect piece of Americana: cowboys, tallgrass, and thundering herds of mustangs. But next year, unless a groundswell of support begins to pay for the cost of keeping the horses in heaven, these windswept fields may be tame and empty again, their only thunder rolling down from passing storms.

When playwright Arthur Miller tried to find an image for the loss of America's innocence, he had a jaded rodeo cowboy kill a wild horse in "The Misfits." It may have been the desire to regain that innocence that started the first wild horse preservation movement 20 years ago. At the time, wild horses had reached another nadir in their North American history. Only a few thousand mustangs roamed western ranges—reduced from a population that had been 2 million to 4 million strong in the 17th century. Their fate was in the hands of ranchers and other landowners. Then, in the late 1960s, a few stories about the slaughter of wild horses triggered a flood of sensational accounts of horses being brutally rounded up and sold for dog food. In an era bent on free expression and preserving nature, the wild horse quickly became a symbol of the nation's vanishing wilderness.

Horses had become extinct here once before. Although North America is the birthplace of horses—beginning with the housecat-sized *Hyracotherium* 60 million years ago—the horses we have today are really European. Eight thousand years ago, our original herds of horses were wiped out by new climates, diseases, and predators brought on by the waning of the Ice Age. It wasn't until 1543, when a few horses managed to escape from Hernando de Soto as he was exploring the Mississippi, that horses appeared on the continent again. In Oklahoma, they quickly took to their old stomping grounds: by the time that the writer Washington Irving traveled through our state in 1832, massive herds were grazing on the prairie.

*About all you can do
with wild horses is
watch them out there
being themselves.*

After centuries of crossbreeding with draft and other domestic horses, "Wild horses come in all shapes, colors, and sizes," says ranch owner John Hughes. "There's one for everybody."

As more and more settlers worked their way west, horse populations boomed and then busted—first supplying trappers, Indians, miners, and everyone else with transportation, then getting replaced almost entirely by trains, trucks, and automobiles. Animals that had been a person's most valuable possession in the 19th century were released to fend for themselves in the 20th century. By the 1960s, these survivors were being slowly crowded out of their ranges. The wild horses of Russia and eastern Europe had already become extinct, now the American mustang looked like it was next in line.

Salvation came from a most unlikely source: schoolchildren. Organized by a Nevada secretary named Velma Johnston, thousands of children across the country inundated Washington with letters in 1969 and 1970, pleading that wild horses be protected. Finally in January of 1971, President Nixon signed the federal Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, forbidding wild horses to be caught or killed, and putting the Bureau of Land Management in charge of "protecting, controlling, and managing" the country's herds. "There wasn't a group in this country that testified against that bill," says Wayne Burkhardt, associate professor of range management at the University of Nevada, Reno. "The National Cattlemen's Association, The National Wool Grower's Association—nobody opposed it. The wild horse cuts across every social and economic boundary in this country. Everyone has an affinity for them. They're part of our heritage."

With the horses officially protected, the schoolchildren could rest easy, but the Bureau of Land Management had its work cut out for it. Wild horses have no natural predators and with millions of acres

of federally protected land in Nevada's Great Basin to graze, their herds began to grow alarmingly. Their population is estimated at about 30,000 head, however, wild horses roam such remote, hidden areas that estimates of their numbers are notoriously low. Their numbers also increase by 15 percent to 20 percent every year. At this rate, they could eat themselves out of a home, along with all the cattle, deer, antelope, and sheep that share their range. Already, the five-year drought that has stricken the West has left few waterholes for them to share; ranchers tell of horses sucking at mud just to get a drink.

Were these any other animals, the BLM's solution would be obvious: cut the population to a manageable size. But when the Bureau proposed that some of the wild horses be humanely destroyed in the early 1980s, Congress was flooded with angry letters once again. According to John Boyles, chief

of the BLM's division of wild horses and burros, "ever since then, when Congress appropriates money for us, the lobbyists force them to include language that prohibits the horses' destruction." Little by little, two sides were forming in the debate about wild horse management, and neither seemed adverse to using the horses themselves as a pawn in their political struggle. Wayne Burkhardt believes environmental groups wanted to use the horses to drive cattle from public lands altogether, while some ranchers want to use the controversy to relegate wild horses to much smaller ranges.

Meanwhile, the BLM has had to scramble to invent ways to keep the horses in check without killing them. Every year, the Bureau now rounds up 4,000 to 6,000 surplus horses and divides them into three groups: Those four years old or younger are sent to the popular Adopt-a-Horse program, which offers wild horses to the public for a nominal fee.

*Salvation for the
mustangs came from a
most unlikely source:
schoolchildren.*



ERIC WESSMAN

Horses between five and nine years of age are sent to the three state penitentiaries in New Mexico, where inmates halter-train them to ready them for adoption. Until three years ago, however, wild horses more than 10 years old simply couldn't be placed. Too old to be trained or adopted, they lived out their lives in holding pens—at enormous expense to the taxpayer.

Enter the wild horse refuges. In 1988, a South Dakota rancher named Dayton Hyde offered to create a sanctuary for the older, unwanted wild horses for a fraction of the cost of keeping them in pens. Given a few years, Hyde said, he could even raise enough donations to make the sanctuary support itself. One year after taking Hyde up on his proposition, the Bureau of Land Management decided to accept bids for a second sanctuary. Over the next few months, nearly 100 bids came in from all over the country, including the winning one from John Hughes and his ranching partner Dan Gallery in Oklahoma. "I think it was the tallgrass that made the difference," Hughes says. "We decided to devote 18,000 acres of it to the horses—and this is an area that can provide a minimum of 100 pounds of beef per acre per year."

Hughes and Gallery admit to having been "totally unfamiliar with wild horses," but they thought that a lifetime of ranching had taught them all that they needed to know. Friends since high school in Bartlesville, both men majored in animal science at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater and were part of the same fraternity, Sigma Nu. After college, Gallery built a home on the east side of Bartlesville, while Hughes went to his family's ranch on the west side.

"Then, in 1968 we formed the Tadpole Cattle Company together," Gallery says, "and it's been real smooth ever since." Twenty years later, when the wild horse refuge came along, it struck them as another good business venture—one that would keep them from having to buy another herd of cattle.

ERIC WESSMAN



The few colts born on the preserve—115 last year—are weaned and broken to a halter, then put up for adoption by the BLM.

Ranchers raising wild horses for profit: at the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge it seems, the two sides of the wild horse debate meet at last. You can't say it's an easy alliance. No matter how free-spirited the cowboy life may seem, ranching is really about control: building fences, herding cattle, rotating pastures, breaking mustangs. To sit back and just watch a bunch of horses run around goes against a cowboy's grain. Don Kyler, for one, needed some time to adjust to this unruly new livestock: "To do something with these horses, you have to out think them," he says. "They'll run and run from you—and I mean these things can flat fly—but once they lose you they'll double back on their tracks like a deer."

For the first few months, the horses gave Kyler endless headaches: if he tried to move a herd, they would split up into little running bands, impossible to recombine. If, on the other hand, Kyler divided a herd into separate pens, they would tear down the fence overnight to get back together. Little by little, however, Kyler says he's learning the horses' behavior, and it seems they're establishing a gradual, grudging sort of peace.

Even though the horses are taken from original herds back in Nevada and regrouped at the refuge, they quickly





Because he was with Sally Hughes, a familiar figure on the refuge, photographer Eric Wessman got closer to these wild horses than he might have alone.

revert to their old ways. "When the horses first come in, we keep them confined for several weeks to teach them to come to the feed wagon," John Hughes says. "That's when they establish their pecking order. In the first group that came in, one particular mare—a large, beautiful chestnut sorrel—let it be known right quick that she was the boss, and she still is."

A single stallion (or gelding, in the case of the refuge) will be in charge of a harem of five to ten mares, keeping watch for enemies and fighting any "bachelor studs" that challenge him. But when the herd decides to bolt, the top mare always leads the way, with the stallion bringing up the rear. When a bachelor stud manages to win another stallion's harem, one of his first tasks is to get rid of future rivals by inducing pregnant females to abort their fetuses. Foals that do get born on the refuge—a total of 115 last year—are weaned and put into the Adopt-a-Horse program.

We tend to think of feral animals as scrawny and misshapen, especially compared to their scientifically bred domestic cousins. But centuries of hard living in the desert have given wild horses qualities that stable horses—long bred for looks and speed alone—have lost. Wild horses can go for days without water or food, while domestic horses depend on regular meals. Wild horses can find water holes up to 60 miles apart in nearly featureless sage-

brush, while domestic horses need only retrace the path to their stalls. True, a mustang might not beat a quarter horse on a flat racetrack, but along the tangled hillsides of the wild horse refuge, Kyler says, "even the cripples can outrun any domestic horse we got." Tougher, smarter, faster. The only things not in the wild horses' favor are their looks, and some would even dispute that. Flying across a pasture as if they've just been let out of school, gobbling up distance for the sheer thrill of it, wild horses are things of raw beauty. They seem to embody our own yearning for open country, the West, the real America.

In Oklahoma, unfortunately, wild horses on the prairie may be a short-lived sight. Although the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge is a great success from the horses' and the ranchers' points of view, for BLM it's an administrative disaster. At \$1.25 per horse per day, plus miscellaneous expenses, the refuge costs close to a million dollars a year to run. The original contract called for Hughes and Gallery to raise enough private donations within three years to pay for the refuge's operation. Yet according to Elmer Walls, head of Oklahoma's BLM office, Hughes and Gallery will probably only raise a tenth of their goal. Hughes says that he hopes to hire a national public relations firm to help out soon, but up till now fund raising has been tortuously slow. "People are always quick to holler at an emotional problem,"

says Wayne Burkhardt, "but they're rarely willing to follow it through to a satisfactory conclusion." In the meantime, the two refuges are nearly full, and the wild horse population keeps growing.

Gallery points out that it costs half as much to keep horses at the refuge as it does to keep them in holding pens. But the BLM is looking for much more drastic solutions to the horse overpopulation problem. "If the sanctuaries aren't going to be self-sufficient, then we have to figure out what to do," says BLM Chief John Boyles. "The board could decide to sterilize all the animals in the refuges, turn them back out on public lands, and try to take out more young horses for the adoption program; or the board might just go to Congress and say, 'Either give us more money for the refuges, or take the language out of the bill (that prohibits horses from being slaughtered).'" Over the next few years, in any case, BLM plans to reduce the country's wild horse population from an estimated 30,000 head to an estimated 20,000 head—enough to create what it calls a "thriving ecological balance." The most likely plan would involve giving the horses vaccines to render them infertile for a year or two, or hormonal implants to make them infertile for three to four years.

None of the long-term management schemes seems to include a wild horse refuge. "If you're thinking of sanctuaries as places to store or warehouse wild horses, then I don't think that they're long for this world," says Burkhardt. "But if you say that the sanctuaries are there for people to come out and see wild horses, that's a different matter." Unfortunately, if private donations are any indication, Oklahoma's wild horse refuge is still more of a warehouse than a tourist attraction. But that could be because the refuge has yet to offer regular tours and most Oklahomans have yet to hear of it. Sally Hughes was the first of her dad's hands to volunteer to work with the wild newcomers, and she says she still gets letters from some of the photographers and environmentalists she has led through the refuge since it opened. "In the very beginning," she admits, "if you asked me whether the refuge could be self-sustaining, I would have said, 'Well...' But after seeing the overwhelming response, I really feel that there are enough people out there that would want it to stay if they knew about it."

People demanding that wild horses be protected usually

leave the question of funding up to the Congress—and eventually the taxpayer. But the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge will only be able to survive if Oklahomans are willing to personally foot the bill. It's the same sort of tough decision facing people in Wyoming and

Idaho who, if they want wolves and mountain lions protected, may have to pay for the cattle those animals kill. In the decade of the environment, Americans are finding conservation costs more than the price of sending a letter to Congress.

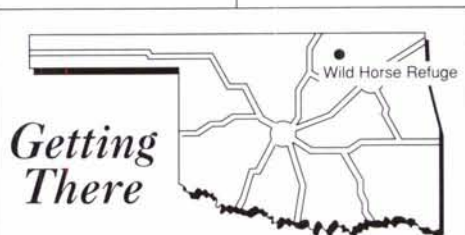
No matter what the outcome, wild horses will probably never be threatened by extinction again. Most people feel that support for wild horses has only grown since the 1970s. Moreover, by dint of their survival alone, mustangs have managed to turn themselves into a commodity. Just as the world's farmers maintain a seed bank—where native seeds are stored in case their hardy, self-sufficient qualities are needed for future crops—many ranchers now feel that wild horses should be kept alive as a sort of living gene bank. "Our domestic horses have been pampered so long

that they would have some trouble surviving on these ranges," Burkhardt says. Someday, if ranchers want to raise horses on parched ranges, they may well need to crossbreed their herds with a few tough mustangs.

Don Kyler himself went out and adopted three mustang colts last year. He doesn't quite trust the horses on the refuge, and they don't quite trust him, but still he can't help but admire them. "In my life," he says, "I've never seen a domestic horse that could hold a candle to these things." He already has the colts halter broken, and next year his sons will break them to ride. "I can't wait to get on one," he adds with a low laugh, "just to see if they're as tough as I think they are."

It's an old paradox of the West. Descended from tame Spanish horses then taught to be wild in the new world, caught, broken, released, and caught again, wild horses seem destined to shuttle continually between freedom and captivity, between our love of wilderness and our urge to possess it. The Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge is a small, moving symbol of this conflicted history. For one more year, at least, you can still see it along S.H. 123—a cloud of dust, a low rumbling, a faint high whinny in the air, a reminder of a wilder America. 

Burkhard Bilger is associate editor of Earthwatch Magazine.



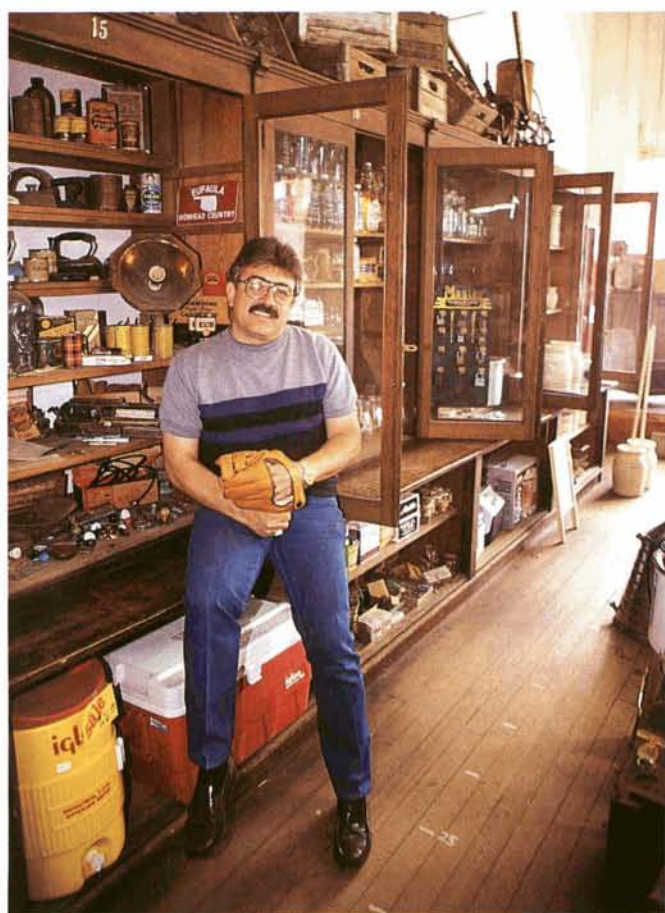
The wild horses of the Prairie National Wild Horse Refuge are usually visible along both sides of S.H. 123, southwest of Bartlesville. For a less high-speed look, take Onion Prairie Road southeast from Highway 123; the intersection is approximately four miles from Bartlesville.

Wild horses can also be seen on the Brent Ranch, east of Dewey. From the intersection of U.S. 75 and Durham Road, travel east for three miles. Look for the horses on the south side of the road. The refuge extends for six more miles to the east. For more information, call (918) 336-0780.

MAIN STREET HARDWARE

A hardware store that blends nostalgia and funk with the everyday thrill of paint and rope and heavy metal. Here, even the carriage bolts have soul.

By Barbara Palmer
Photograph by Dave Crenshaw



Hardware store owner Marty Rucker keeps one set of display shelves crowded with old inventory. (The paint marks on the wooden floor have been used to measure rope since 1906.)

One afternoon a buffalo head fell off the wall at a Eufaula hardware store and disintegrated into a lumpy pile of dust. Though unfortunate, it was a fitting moment in the long life of one of Oklahoma's oldest hardware stores. From its planked wooden floors right up to its pressed tin ceiling, the Main Street Hardware Store is a living tribute to inertia.

Marty Rucker, a retired Navy officer and West Virginia transplant, bought the hardware store in 1983. But for at least 50 years before that, from the era of horsepower and nail barrels right up to the age of PVC pipe, the hardware store permanently escaped spring cleaning. Previous owners ran the place like any interesting attic: new stuff comes in, old stuff makes way.

Once Rucker could get in to take a good look around (he cleared the aisles with a snow shovel), he discovered that he had purchased not just a hardware store, but a virtual museum of farm and household technology. "You should have seen this place," cackles Rucker gleefully.

There were buggy parts mixed with power drill bits. Along with pipe fittings, rope, and crockpots, the store held kerosene-powered clothes irons, wooden vacuum cleaners, and ominous crates of patent medicines.

Like an archaeological excavation, the store's inventory revealed the history of technological innovation by layers. Modern merchandise covered many of the shelves of the first floor, but the farther back Rucker went and the more he poked into the corners of the wooden display shelves, the more he found himself awash in old tools and household items.

The real finds, though, were in the store's huge basement,

which one still enters by walking down a ramp installed to bring buggies up to the ground floor. In 1983, the basement held a historical logjam: century-old cotton scales, an old forge blower, seed cabinets, a 1930's brass washing machine still gleaming inside its packing crate. Even with a coat of ancient dust anointing everything in the store, "It was evident it had a lot of potential and a lot of history," says Rucker.

As a reference point, Rucker keeps on display a 1906 photograph of one of the store's first owners, a pair of brothers named Ecklekamp. In the photograph, a white-aproned, prosperous-looking merchant beams amidst orderly rows of merchandise. Ecklekamp had reason to be so satisfied. Those were salad days for Eufaula, then a bustling center for McIntosh County farms. The cotton brought to the town's nine gins was of such high quality it was listed on the London Exchange.

After the Ecklekamps lost the store in the Depression, successive store owners proved to be less tidy. Prominent among them was Pat O'Reilly, the third owner and the man most responsible for the hardware store's offbeat, neglected charm. O'Reilly installed the buffalo heads and mounted pairs of longhorns on the walls, and apparently never once felt the need to throw anything away or clear anything out. Eufaula residents are fond of remembering O'Reilly's uncanny ability to survey the disheveled shelves and pluck out any given item.

In Marty Rucker, the hardware store has an owner who hearkens back to the orderly Ecklekamp brothers. Rucker has slowly and systematically cleared out much of the old inventory. He sold his stock of plows and harrows with a showman's deliberation: one at a time, bringing an implement up from the basement each morning until he had sold all but one of each model.

A pair of glass-doored display shelves holds some choice examples of ancient stock, including 40-year-old baseball gloves still in their boxes and a glass minnow trap manufactured in a Checotah factory. Larger items are dispersed throughout the store, popping up at nearly every turn.

Many shoppers have bought the old horse collars and buggy whips for nostalgic reasons, but customers who actually need the old stock turn up regularly. Among them are members of an Amish community near Chouteau who buy buggy parts. And Rucker recently sold a few hundred milk bottles to a local dairy that is starting up a home delivery service.

Rucker has taken pains to preserve as much of the store's charm as possible, mixing the old and new with good results. Instead of metal shelves, Rucker uses wooden tables, sorting merchandise into old packing crates. He's repainted the marks on the wooden floor where Ecklekamp measured rope and still stores carriage bolts in an 80-year-old wooden carousel with dove-tailed joints.

And when Rucker cleared things out, he left the really good stuff where he found it. A 1961 promotional calendar

from a pipe-fitting company, the kind with a dozen bathing beauties, hangs fly-specked on the wall. The wasp nest nailed up high is a kind of inside joke, recalling the number of wasp nests clinging to the walls when Rucker took over.

Rucker still uses the massive safe near the door, but he retired the pot-bellied stove and installed a more modern heating system. The cooling system, though, still consists of two flanks of ceiling fans, some strategically placed floor fans, and a pop machine.

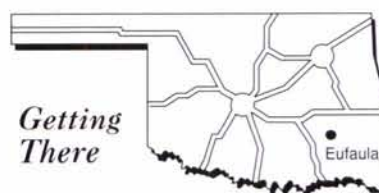
Whenever he can, Rucker resists plastic-bubble packaging, buying items in bulk so customers can pick up, say, three screws and 11 four penny nails. "The only thing that keeps the major discount retailers from killing us is the service we offer," says Rucker. "This is a small town; we know most of the customers. That makes a heck of a difference."

In the back of the store, about two thirds of the way to the ceiling, is a loft where Ecklekamp sat. Marty Rucker sits there today, with a cordless phone and a computer.

One afternoon, two or three years ago, a couple who had been married at the hardware store stopped in. They told Rucker that a bookkeeper who was also a Baptist minister had married them on the steps leading up to the loft. The couple was amazed, says Rucker, at how little things in the hardware store had changed.

Even the bookkeeper's long-legged stool, the kind Bob Cratchit sat at, is still hanging around. 

Barbara Palmer is associate editor of Oklahoma Today. Dave Crenshaw is a photographer for The Tulsa Tribune.



Main Street Hardware is only one of several historic commercial buildings on Main Street; several blocks have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. More than 80 percent of downtown Eufaula was built between 1900 and 1930.

The Main Street Deli, two doors down from the hardware store, at 100 S. Main, opened a year ago in a 1898 building. (The deli owners ran the Subway Deli on Northwest Expressway in Oklahoma City for 15 years before moving to Eufaula.) Around the corner is JM's Cafe. The cafe was established in 1953 and is a bastion of home cooking. "If you go away hungry from JM's," says a regular, "you're not trying very hard."

Beaches and a park on the shore of Lake Eufaula are eight blocks from Main Street. A bus makes a regular circuit from downtown to the beach.

Main Street Hardware, at 116 S. Main Street in Eufaula, is open from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Saturday and from 12 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. The telephone number is (918) 689-9540.

STARRY, STARRY NIGHTS

DAVID FITZGERALD

**Clear skies and sweeping horizons
make Oklahoma heavenly for star-watchers.**

By Maura McDermott

On a quiet, snowy day in 1970 Gunther Schwartz of Lincoln, Nebraska, drove down a road near Lost City in northeastern Oklahoma looking for something. Six nights earlier, on the evening of January third, sonic booms had been heard from Tulsa to Tahlequah. In Wagoner, it had sounded as if two freight trains were colliding. At the same moment a ball of fire, brighter than the full moon, had streaked pink, then orange across the sky, finally exploding like a giant Roman candle. In little Lost City (population 200), the light was blinding and the sound so penetrating you could feel it.

Unknown to most Oklahomans, automatic cameras in Hominy and Woodward and in Pleasanton, Kansas, had photographed the fireball as it fell through the earth's atmosphere, heading for the hills of Oklahoma. The three cameras were part of the Smithsonian Institution's Prairie Network, set up in 1965 to photograph the paths of bright, rare meteors; in the ideal situation, a computer at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, would use the photos to pinpoint a square mile area as the probable landing site of a meteor.

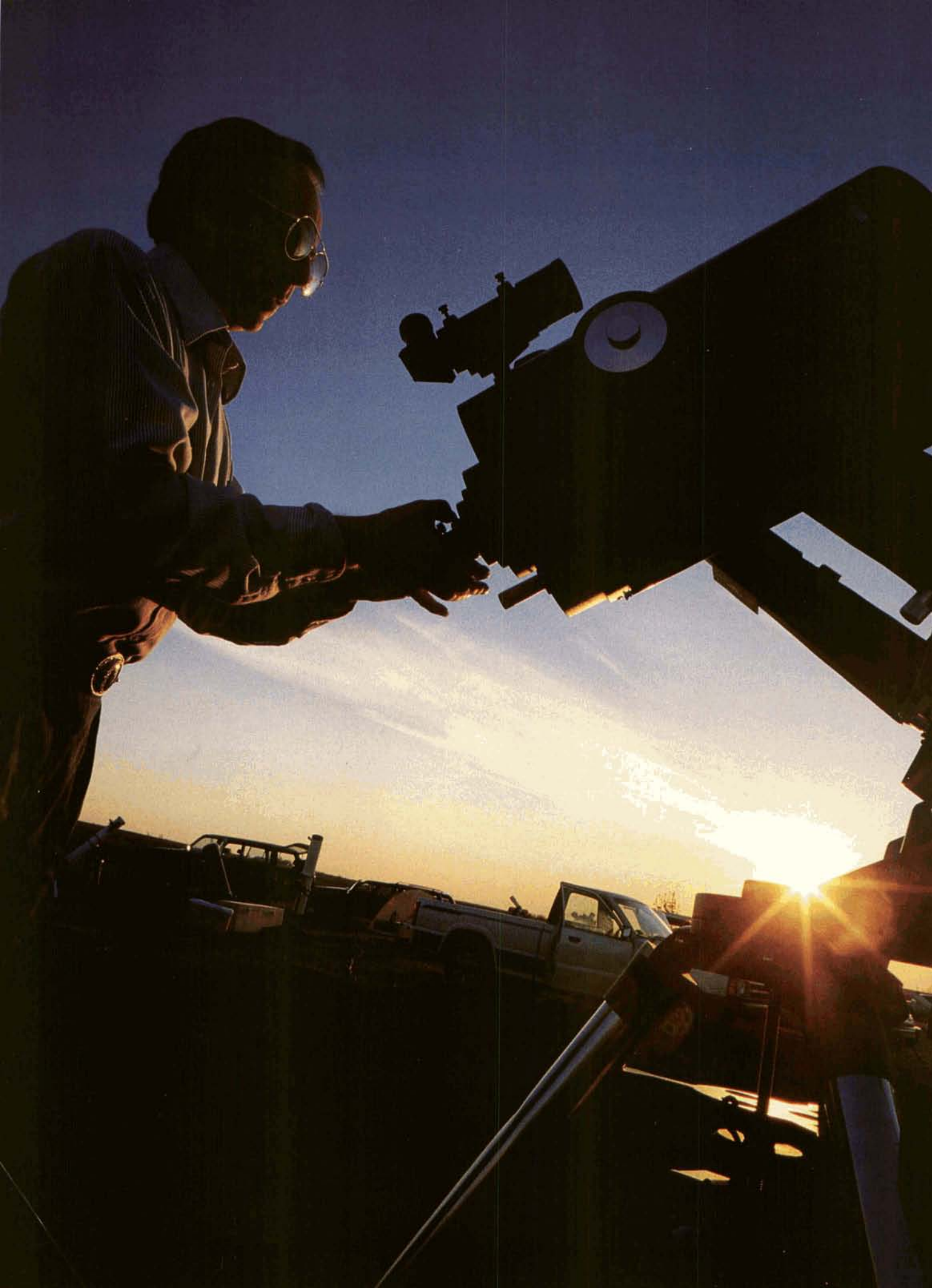
Six days later, Schwartz was in Lost City because the ideal had happened.

It is never easy, however, to find a meteorite. Only three meteorites had been found in the United States in the preceding decade; although, hundreds of meteors had fallen. If the Lost City meteorite was found it would be famous—no meteorite had ever been recovered in a search guided by photographs of its path through the atmosphere.

This was to be Gunther Schwartz's lucky day. As the director of the Prairie Network slowly drove the deserted road, he ran right up to his objective. Literally. A black object

David Fitzgerald shot this photo of two cowboys and the night sky over a period of eight hours at Alabaster Caverns State Park near Freedom. (The "campfire" was an electronic flash.) It's not the stars that are moving; the trails show the track of the earth's rotation.





jugged through the snow right in front of his car. He stopped, got out of the car, and picked up a cold, burnt-looking rock. The Lost City meteorite had been found.

On a winter's evening in an earlier age, legend says the Creek Indians watched a similar meteor fall, bringing them fire to cook their meat, warm their hands, and light their faces. They accepted this as a gift from the gods. But we live in the Space Age, and we use the language of science rather than the language of legends to explain the universe. So the Lost City meteorite was sent to Washington, D.C., to be studied. It was found to be a football-sized, 22-pound rock that had traveled all the way from the asteroid belt beyond the planet Mars to land in Cherokee County.

This rock, or meteorite, is one more piece in the puzzle that is our universe. And it wasn't just happenstance that it was found in Oklahoma.

With Oklahoma's clear, unpolluted skies and wide open spaces, the view from here to the heavens is unobstructed. And in what was once the American frontier, surprising numbers of people are exploring the "final frontier." From the banks of the Red River to the shores of Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma's amateur astronomers gather in parks and fields and parking lots for what are casually referred to as star parties, gatherings (including one with a national reputation) that can draw anywhere from six to sixty telescopes and half-a-dozen to hundreds of star gazers. These same star gazers populate long-established astronomy clubs in the Sooner State. They build backyard observatories housing large telescopes that thirty years ago would only have been owned by institutions. They study to become telescope makers. And in the process, they sometimes put Oklahoma in the astronomical record books: A group in Ardmore claims to have the largest privately owned telescope mirror in the world.

In addition, this summer a good many of these amateur astronomers anticipate seeing a once-in-a-lifetime event. A total eclipse of the sun will occur July 11 at 2:06 p.m. Central Daylight Time. In Oklahoma, 60 percent to 65 percent of the sun will be covered. If it's a cloudy day, it may not be discernible, but if the day's clear, says amateur astronomer Clive Cadle, "It will get kind of eerie."

The eclipse, which will last for 6 minutes and 57 seconds, will be the longest for the next 140 years.

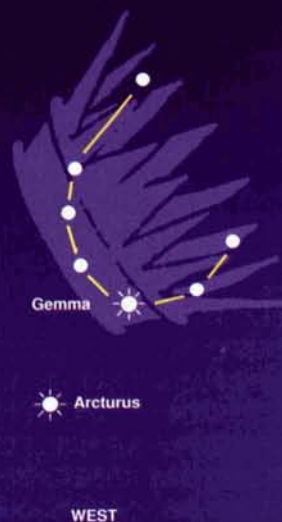
The science of astronomy began in Oklahoma the day people began noticing the regular east to west movements of the sun, moon, and stars. The trek of the moon and constellations across the sky each night made, and still makes, a convenient clock. They move a little more than the width of your fist in an hour.

Likewise, the rhythmic cycle of constellations appearing and disappearing from the sky each year makes for a kind of calendar. The cluster of stars known by us as the *Pleiades*, or the Seven Sisters, was watched by many of the tribes that now inhabit Oklahoma. Its disappearance heralded spring; its reappearance before sunrise, harvest.

Around the campfire Native American parents told their children stories about the stars. Cherokee children learned the story of the dog who stole corn meal from the mill at night. Surprised by three waiting women with sticks, he ran off howling, the meal spilling from his mouth. The fine white meal spread into the sky and became Where-the-Dog-Ran, or as we know it, the Milky

Amateur astronomy is a hobby with a lot of staying power; machinist Clive Cadle has been a member of the Oklahoma City Astronomy Club for 23 years.

THE NORTHERN CROWN

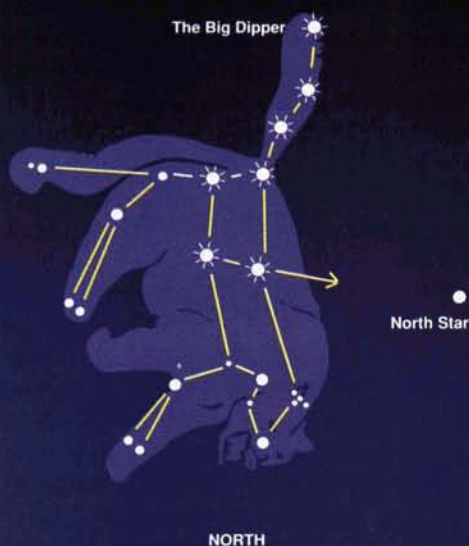


Corona Borealis

This semicircle of seven stars has been interpreted many ways. Where the Greeks saw a crown, the Skidi Pawnee saw "the circle of chiefs." The Shawnee imagined the seven stars as celestial sisters, with the constellation's brightest star, *Gemma*, being the most beautiful sister. *Gemma* was the wife of the great hunter star, White Hawk, or as we know it, *Arcturus*.

This small constellation benefits from a dark location. One way to find it is to first find *Arcturus*. Face west: in July, *Arcturus* is the brilliant star about three quarters of the way up from the horizon. From *Arcturus*, draw a line up and overhead to see the Northern Crown. As summer progresses both constellations are a little lower in the western sky each evening.

THE GREAT BEAR



Ursa Major

The Great Bear is a star-bright constellation that includes the asterism, or pattern of stars, known as the Big Dipper. The Cherokee saw three stars of this constellation as hunters, and four other stars as the Great Bear. All year the hunters chased the bear; when they finally wounded her, her blood reddened the autumn leaves. Look for the Great Bear due north and slightly west in summer.

The Big Dipper, with its seven stars, looked like a canoe to the Alabama Indians. According to legend, when the Celestial Canoe (the dipper bowl) appeared to touch the horizon on summer nights, visitors from the sky would climb down to play stickball. You can use the Big Dipper to find the North Star or *Polaris*, the one star in the sky that does not appear to move. Some Plains tribes aptly named it, the-Star-that-Does-Not-Walk-Around. Draw a line from bottom to top through the two stars that mark the front of the dipper's bowl; this line points toward the North Star.

Way. The Skidi (Wolf Band) Pawnee decorated their tipis with painted stars, as did the Kiowa. They also looked to the sky for clues about how the tribe should live. They believed that the spirits of the morning and evening stars came to warriors in dreams and exhorted them to acts of bravery.

Our European ancestors also relied on the stars, both to mark time and to give them guidance in their daily affairs. Astrology is the ancient belief that the positions of the stars influence what happens in our lives. Now firmly separated from astronomy, which is the scientific study of the stars, astrology nonetheless remains popular. On magazine racks in any Oklahoma supermarket, farmer's almanacs offer astrological advice on such dilemmas as when to plant root crops (during the waning moon is said to be best). To this day, amateur astronomers who wince when introduced as astrologers may have grandparents who still "plant by the signs."

As Oklahoma became settled and divided into sections by roads, country folks found easy ways to get practical information about the workings of the solar system. One could tell the first days of spring and fall by watching the sun rise or set smack in the middle of a road that ran east and west. In the one-room country schools you didn't necessarily find telescopes, but you could find children peering through the long downspout of a rain gutter to the sky. The gutter blocked the light of the sky, allowing one to see the stars shining in the middle of the day.

Ten years after statehood, Oklahomans scattered over a 60-mile-wide swath of land witnessed a sight not to be seen here again for hundreds of years. On June 8, 1918, for about a minute in the late afternoon, the sun went dark over Oklahoma in a *total* solar eclipse. Luther Wood of rural Checotah recalls riding home from town in the back of a wagon when the sun slowly seemed to die, and the air got suddenly cool. "People said the chickens went to roost, and the cows started back to the barns," he remembers. "We kids didn't know what was happening, but Dad explained it to us."

Astronomy is a passion often kindled in childhood, during the years one television show has aptly dubbed "The Wonder Years." Surprisingly, the interest is not limited to children for whom math and science come easily, says Wayne Wyrick, director of the Kirkpatrick Planetarium in Oklahoma City. In fact, Wyrick has been told by school teachers that it's often the hard-to-reach children who are most fascinated by space and who most eagerly enter the planetarium's annual "Visions of the Universe" space art competition.

Wyrick's interest in astronomy dates to his own childhood, and it was sparked, he says, by his father, who was interested in the subject and who spent time answering his string of questions about the stars, planets, and galaxies. "I would sit and listen (sometimes) for half an hour, which is a long time for a kid," Wyrick recalls, "and I was never bored."

At the age of five, Wyrick sent a letter to Santa asking for a telescope. He got a 60mm refracting telescope through which he could see the moon, Mars, and Jupiter but no real detail. His appetite whetted by tantalizing glimpses of the moon and planets, Wyrick, like other determined beginners, moved on to larger telescopes as soon as he could. Clive Cadle, who with his wife, Beryl, is an active member of the Oklahoma City Astronomy Club, recalls he actually returned his first telescope within a few days of purchase. "Venus was just a fuzzy blob," he remembers. "I never could focus it."

His next telescope, which cost him three times as much, rewarded him with a view of the polar ice caps of Mars. "It might just be the best thing I've seen,"

continued on page 26

A Telescope Named Mira

Mira was her name. He built her from scratch for less than \$500, using bearings, springs, and shafts salvaged from big diesel trucks. He worked on her lovingly for five months every evening after work while the stars she was meant to magnify trekked across the sky. When she was done and securely fastened in her trailer, she wasn't pretty; the guy issuing the license plate said she looked like a cement mixer. And, in fact, because there was no category for telescope, the man licensed her as such. But she was big, and she could stand being kicked around. Soon she would become famous on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" as the world's largest portable clock-driven telescope.

Mira was the first of many telescopes made by Byron Melland of Cetus Telescopes, a company named for a constellation that looks like a whale. Melland migrated to Oklahoma from California and located in rural McIntosh County near Lake Eufaula. The low cost of property here attracted him and made it possible for him to start his small business.

Melland builds the type of telescope known as a Newtonian reflector, named after one of the first of its kind built by Sir Isaac Newton. The telescope consists of a tube with one end open to the sky. At the other end is a curved mirror. Identified by the diameters of their curved mirrors, a 24-inch telescope (like Mira) has a 24-inch mirror. The larger the mirror, the more light that can be gathered and the fainter the object in the night sky that can be seen.

Telescopes up to a very respectable size can be built without using any high-tech machinery, so telescope-making is a popular hobby among amateur astronomers. The hobby can also become a profitable small business for the astronomer who is also a skilled craftsman.

Melland builds twelve-and-a-half-inch and 24-inch telescopes in a barn on his property and sells them mail order to people all over the country. Perhaps because he has so often worked as a mechanic, he is particularly proud of the sturdiness and stability of his telescopes. "They are not delicate instruments," Byron Melland says. "They are made for

people who are going to use them."

His one concession to luxury: the precision clock-drive which is necessary for astrophotography. At \$1,850 for the smaller model, Melland's telescope is priced below the going rate. "You only have to skip a few house payments to afford one," he quips.

Indeed, Melland's telescopes are made by a working man for working people. He has sold to truck drivers, who take their telescopes out with them on the lonely, midnight highways. He also put together the telescope at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. "Ph.D.s and diesel mechanics can talk telescopes on the same level," he remarks. "Telescopes are our common language."

Raised on a Nebraska farm, Melland learned early the pioneer skill of improvising, of making what is available work. Later, fascinated by astronomy and unable to afford a ready-made telescope, Melland scrounged used parts at the diesel repair shop where he worked to build Mira. He and the friends who helped him had no blueprint; they designed Mira around the available material.

Melland loved the challenge of making a telescope, an object that seems so intricate and magical, out of scraps. "I would get little gears and motors from the junk pile and make something I could use to look at the rings of Saturn," he says.

Melland has that innovative, do-it-yourself-for-less attitude you find along the back roads of Oklahoma. And that's probably a good thing. It's unlikely an Oklahoma telescope maker would ever become a millionaire from his work, since the creations are said to last virtually forever—some 300 years easy. But there are other types of compensation. Melland reasons that the telescopes he makes are his form of immortality. And he doesn't want his business to get too big: "I like being able to say, 'Here's the telescope I built for you,'" he confides.

— Maura McDermott

Byron Melland's telescopes can be ordered by writing: Cetus Telescopes, Rt. 1, Box 1059, Checotah, OK 74426.



They may not be pretty, says Byron Melland, but his telescopes are as sturdy as they come.

Cadle says, still awed twenty-five years after the experience.

Seasoned now by years of practicing his calling, Wayne Wyrick now urges parents not to buy their children cheap telescopes, because such models often have poor optics and are difficult to use. The result: They end up on the closet shelf. "Anything below \$100 is worthless," Wyrick says.

In fact, no investment is necessary to launch a child, or an adult, for that matter, into the magic of astronomy. Larry Kennedy, observing director for the Arkansas-Oklahoma Astronomical Society, actually advises beginners to learn the constellations and bright stars using the naked eye first. Although the constellations often don't look much like their names, they are easy to recognize after a couple of nights out. The brightest stars in prominent constellations are visible even in the city. "Without learning these, you will never find your way around the sky," anyway, Kennedy explains.

One of the best ways to learn the layout of the sky is to take advantage of the programs offered by Oklahoma's amateur astronomy clubs. Meetings offer speakers, slide shows, and demonstrations, often at a level that anyone can

understand. Many clubs also publish monthly newsletters chock-full of maps, charts, and articles to help a person learn and enjoy the night sky. Ownership of any special equipment, such as a telescope, is not required for membership. "We welcome anybody," says Newell Pottorf of the Astronomy Club of Tulsa.

The Oklahoma City Astronomy Club offers a novice program half an hour before its main meeting begins. According to Clive Cadle, who runs the program, beginners are given a tour of the sky that night, including the major constellations visible from the city. He also offers advice on books and magazines to read, how to use star charts, and information on telescopes. "This is information I badly needed when I got started," Cadle confides.

As the desire to see more of the night sky than the naked eye can deliver intensifies, Newell Pottorf advises moving to binoculars, which are easy to use and relatively inexpensive. "Binoculars will open up the sky for you," promises Pottorf.

Through binoculars, the moon changes from a featureless disc hanging like a light bulb in a dark room into what it really is—a little world with a rough face, complete with craters and seas (the dark plains on the

moon's face). The moon's left eye is the Sea of Tranquility, over which Oklahoman Thomas Stafford hovered in his Apollo 10 landing craft in the dress rehearsal for the moon landing. Stafford, who carried the Oklahoma flag with him into space, described the Sea as looking like "wet clay," a description that recalls the soil of his native state.

When one finally gets to the point that he must have a telescope, Larry Kennedy advises spending the time to look through as many telescopes as one can first. The best way to do this, as he so aptly puts it, "is to be associated with people who like astronomy." For instance, the Tulsa club offers the public a chance to look through a dozen of its members' scopes during two public viewing nights held each fall at Tulsa Junior College. Last year, 1,200 people took the club up on its offer. In Bartlesville, the local astronomy club sets its telescopes up for public nights each spring and fall at Jo Allen Lowe Park. A planetarium at Ft. Sill, the only one of its kind in the Army, is used to teach artillery soldiers how to use



TIMOTHY L. HUETTNER

The Lagoon Nebula, located a mere 2,000 light years away, is a big cloud of gas and dust. Starlight makes it light up "like a big neon bulb," says astrophotographer Dr. Timothy Huettner of Tulsa.



DAVID FITZGERALD

Some people come to star parties with a shopping list of things they want to observe. Others just wing it, says Dr. Timothy Huettner. Huettner, at the telescope, got his first look at the Sombrero galaxy at this gathering. At left, Scott McCutchen.

the stars to determine field positions. Special programs for civilians are offered periodically. And, in the case of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Astronomy Society, members actually own their own Daniel Studdard telescope—a 29-inch monster of a scope—as a group; the society schedules public viewings with it one night each month, March through November. The Studdard telescope is the largest telescope in the two-state area, and the views it offers are superb. “Everything looks good through a 29,” says observatory manager Larry Kennedy of Pocola.

It is difficult to look at a big Oklahoma night sky without getting an inkling of what draws people to astronomy. Talking to amateur astronomers, however, is also eye-opening. David Harbour, whose own passion for the stars led him to start a small telescope company, describes the attraction this way: “Without leaving your backyard, you can travel a quarter of a million miles to the moon or millions of light years to other galaxies.”

“You get a feeling of wholeness,” says Scott McCutchen of the Lake Eufaula-area Tuva Astronomy Organization. “After all, we are star dust. The elements that make up our bodies were made inside the stars.”

Ron Wood, also of the Tuva club, agrees: “Astronomy helps you to realize your place in the universe. No longer are you just an Oklahoman or an American or even, an earthling. Astronomy broadens the mind.”

Some say, it also heals. Astronomy has been used by some psychiatrists to treat patients. Wood, who holds degrees in astrophysics and human relations, believes looking through a telescope can have a calming effect on a person. In the end, though, all other benefits aside, it is most often the sheer beauty of the night sky that motivates Oklahoma astronomers to battle sleepiness, summer’s heat, and winter’s cold in pursuit of their avocation. “If you like to look at beautiful things, then what is more beautiful than majestic Saturn, with its awesome rings, shimmering in its own majestic light?” asks Harbour.

Someone else might answer the “deep sky” objects, which seem to magically appear out of the blackness when a telescope is aimed in their direction. Faint. Delicate. Lovely. Some are nebulae, clouds of glowing gas and dust, with names that suggest their shapes: Ring, Veil, Horse Head, North America, Eagle, Rosette, Lagoon, Helix, Owl.

Some are galaxies, like the Whirlpool galaxy, which looks as if it is enveloping its companion galaxy, or the Sombrero galaxy, which resembles a luminous Mexican hat. Closer to home, there are the star clusters. One type,

THE SUMMER TRIANGLE

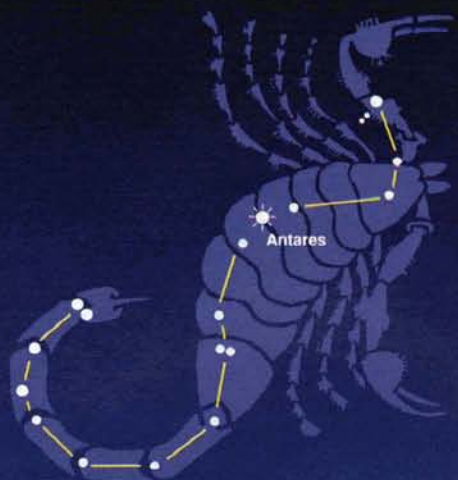


EAST

Deneb, Vega, Altair

This asterism hinges on three very bright stars: **Deneb**, **Vega**, and **Altair**. **Deneb**, a blue-white super giant star, marks the tail of the constellation **Cygnus**, the Swan. The Swan looks as if it’s flying along the Milky Way. The Skidi Pawnee thought of the Milky Way as the Path of the Dead to the sky, though it’s really the star-rich disk of our spiral galaxy. **Deneb** marks the Triangle’s northern corner. **Vega** is the brightest star in the summer sky and part of the small constellation **Lyra**; **Vega** marks the western point of the Triangle. The Skidi Pawnee called **Vega** the Black Star because a giant meteor appeared to come from it one night and rained burnt-black rocks upon the tribe. Then, says the legend, a star spirit rose from the rocks and guided a brave to a herd of wild ponies. **Altair** in the constellation **Aquila**, the Eagle, is the second brightest star in the summer sky. On evenings in early July it can be found low in the east-southeast. From its corner in the south look for the other two stars of the Triangle.

THE SCORPION



SOUTH

Scorpius

One would be hard pressed to find a constellation that looks more like its namesake than *Scorpius*, with its long, curving tail. The constellation stings the southern horizon all summer as it moves from southeast to southwest. Look for the constellation's brightest star, red *Antares*, the heart of the Scorpion, low in the southern sky. The two stars side by side at the very tip of the Scorpion's tail were called the *Swimming Ducks* by the Skidi Pawnee. The late winter arrival of these star-birds was a sign that migrating birds would soon return to the North. In the fall, when the ducks and geese were flying south, the *Swimming Ducks* disappeared with them below the southern horizon.

the globular cluster, is a tight ball of hundreds of thousands of stars blazing as one. The globulars swarm around the center of our galaxy like bees around their queen.

For each astronomer who is motivated by beauty, however, there is probably another who is spurred on by curiosity, a desire to understand our relationship to the universe. These people are mesmerized by the amazing facts that an amateur astronomer can come across. Amazing fact number one: you can walk outside anywhere in Oklahoma, look up, and see another galaxy, a galaxy it would take you some 2 million years to reach if you traveled at the speed of light. Amazing fact number two: The Andromeda Galaxy, a fuzzy oval patch of 300 billion stars in the constellation Andromeda that is visible to the naked eye from September until February each year, is our sister galaxy. It looks very much like our beautiful spiral Milky Way galaxy would look if we could somehow be transported above it. "It's like looking at yourself," observes Thomas McNicholas of the Tuva club.

In fact, in many ways, astronomy can be an intensely personal enterprise. When Galileo looked through his primitive telescope and discovered the moons of Jupiter, he was living the subconscious dream of every dedicated amateur astronomer in Oklahoma. "The universe is so vast (and changing) that it is impossible for the small group of professionals to see everything," explains Ron Wood. "Stars can blow up, becoming supernovas, and when they do they suddenly become much brighter. And you might be the first to notice it."

That was the case for one Oklahoman in 1956. On that night Tulsa Leon H. Stuart observed and then photographed a bright white flash on the moon, a flash that to this day remains unexplained. According to Wood, every year several comets are discovered by amateurs. The common denominator in these sightings: a willingness to scan the sky night after night. Such close observing takes patience and perseverance, qualities David Higgins has in abundance. Higgins observes with a large 24-inch telescope at a backyard observatory in Krebs. His particular area of interest: finding very faint objects.

David Higgins looks inside distant galaxies at their internal structure, zeroing in on, for example, the globular clusters of a galaxy such as Andromeda. "I like to see objects within objects," he explains. "You may be the first human to actually look at an object."

Having a chance to contribute to the body of astronomical knowledge motivates a good many of Oklahoma's amateur astronomers. As a girl in Cordell, Ellen Scheer and her friends would "lie out on quilts and look at stars." She went on to do variable star research while a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma in the late '30s under professor J. O'Hassler. Scheer recalls the research methods used at O.U. as being rudimentary, but exciting. Her observations of variable stars (stars that fluctuate in brightness over a predictable period of time) became part of data used at Harvard University.

A fine line exists between serious amateur and professional astronomers. David Higgins, who studied physics in college, now works for the Army Reserves. But he has written articles about his observations of the night sky for *Deep Sky* and *Astronomy* magazines. "In general," Higgins says, "professionals tend to delve into the theoretical, while amateurs spend more time actually looking at the sky."

There are a few clouds along the horizon, going south. All over the field red lights are being turned on, and weirdly lit faces are bending over card tables spread with maps and charts. Telescopes are lined up like heavy artillery. Finally, after days of record rain, there is a chilly coal-

continued on page 30

What's Up This Year: A Guide to Oklahoma Skies.

Getting acquainted with Oklahoma's summer celestial offerings—from the other planets in our solar system to annual meteor showers—is almost as easy as looking up. Planets look like very bright stars, but they don't twinkle. They are both easy to spot and interesting under scrutiny. The easiest to watch with the naked eye are the two nearest, Venus and Mars, and the two largest, Jupiter and Saturn.

★ Catching a sight of the planet **Mercury** is like trying to retrieve mercury spilled from a broken thermometer. This hot, stony planet usually lurks behind the glare of the setting or rising sun, but several times this year it will be high enough in the night sky to be seen. The best opportunity: mid-July right after sunset. (Look low in the west, while the moon is new.) On July 14 and 15 Mercury and Jupiter will shine close together, only about a finger's width apart.

★ Named for the Roman goddess of love and beauty, **Venus** is the brightest object in the sky besides the sun and moon. It shines a lovely blue-white color and is a conspicuous morning or evening star, never too far from the horizon. Usually the first "star" one sees in the evening, it is often the "star bright" one wishes on. In 1991 Venus is an evening star from January to July. On the evening of June 17 there will be a sight worth waiting for—Venus, Jupiter, and Mars shining very close together in the west. Venus emerges as a morning star from late August to the end of the year.

★ Named for the god of war, **Mars** is roughly half the size of earth and the fourth closest planet to the sun. It is easy to identify because of its reddish color. It will set soon after the sun this summer and then will not be visible until December, when it begins to rise with the sun.

★ **Jupiter** is so large that it almost became another sun, and fittingly it is named after the Roman king of the gods. To the naked eye it is almost as bright as Venus. Into July, the planet can be seen in the western sky near sunset. In the fall before sunrise Jupiter will be in the eastern sky in the constellation Leo.

★ The sight of **Saturn** through a telescope leaves some people speechless. Even with the naked eye, Saturn is a pretty sight and easily visible in the city. Saturn is the planet watcher's choice this summer as it will be the only planet visible for very long after sunset. During August Saturn

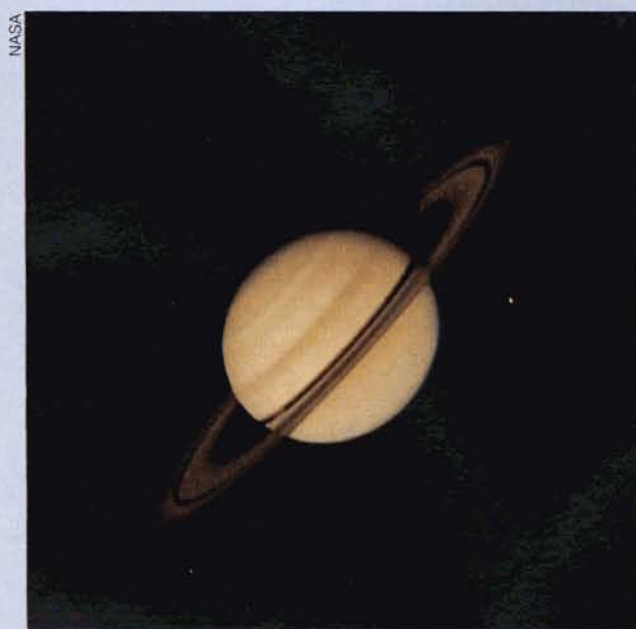
passes overhead before midnight. On September and October evenings Saturn will be obvious in the southern sky right after dark in the constellation Capricorn.

★ The best shows of the year for star-gazers—sans-telescopes—are the annual meteor showers, when four to five times the everyday number of shooting stars can be seen. Meteor showers are like an all night fireworks display. The **Perseid Meteor shower**, occurring July 27 through August 16, reaches its peak around August 12. All you need to enjoy the meteor showers is a reclining lawn chair, the hood of a car, or a blanket to lie on. Fifty to

one hundred meteors per hour streak across the summer sky, all appearing to come from the north, from the constellation *Perseus*. The heaviest display is after midnight.

★ There are twelve well-known meteor showers per year, but the Perseid and the Geminid showers are the best. The **Geminid Meteor shower** boasts the most meteors per hour, but it occurs the second week of December when the weather prohibits lawn chairs. However enthusiastic meteor watchers have been known to stuff themselves into down sleeping bags just for the show.

—Maura McDermott



Prime-time viewing this summer: the planet Saturn will rise in the eastern sky before midnight.

continued from page 28

black sky. As the few remaining clouds disappear and the night progresses, bringing new constellations into view, the buzz of low voices grows louder. But unlike most parties, there is no music, no obvious drinking, and emphatically, no bright lights. This is the big event of the year in Oklahoma amateur astronomy.

This is Okie-Tex.

What began as a fall weekend retreat for Oklahoma City Astronomy Club members has expanded to a week-long event advertised in astronomy magazines months in advance. It draws people to Lake Murray State Park from places as far away as Michigan and the state of Washington. In 1990 the seventh annual party drew 160 people. Situated in the rolling foothills of the Arbuckle Mountains hours from the skylines of Dallas and Oklahoma City, the Lake Murray area offers the dark skies necessary for a successful gathering. There are strict lighting controls at the party—no white light after sunset. Gazing into the heavens during Okie-Tex can be a 24-hour-a-day proposition, says Clive Cadle, since some party-goers bring sun filters.

For people who often spend long nights alone in the dark, Okie-Tex is their once a year chance to talk shop. "At star parties you find out what others have been looking at, what they're excited about," says Wayne Wyrick.

The party can take on the feeling of a revival. Many of the amateur astronomers who attend Okie-Tex share almost a religious zeal for astronomy, and a good many of those believe learning to look closely at the stars can eventually change how one sees life in general. "I believe people really don't learn to see in their everyday lives," says Clive Cadle. "But astronomy teaches you...Watching the sky is analogous to sitting for a whole day on the rim of the Grand Canyon—you can't see everything, but there is always something new to see."



To the naked eye, the Andromeda Galaxy, 2 million light years away, looks like a fuzzy star. Even through a telescope the galaxy is hazy; this photograph combined four separate transparencies.

Writer Maura McDermott of Checotah lives on a private drive marked by a homemade observatory signpost. This is her first article for Oklahoma Today.



Getting There

The Kirkpatrick Planetarium is the only planetarium in the state open regularly to the public. Its projector fills a 40-foot purple dome with 4,000 simulated stars that represent constellations and galaxies visible from the Oklahoma City area. The program changes with every season; "Summer Nights" will be shown June 22 to September 21.

For times, call the Planetarium, Omniplex Science Museum, Kirkpatrick Center, 2100 N.E. 52nd, at (405) 424-5545. Tickets to Planetarium shows must be reserved.

The Okie-Tex party is set for October 1-6 at a group camp at Lake Murray, near Ardmore. On Saturday, there will be a swap meet where surplus telescopes and other equipment are traded and sold. Professional astronomers are flown in to lecture during the week. The camp can accommodate about 170 star gazers, first come, first served. For more information, write Beryl Cadle, 6616 NW 20th, Bethany, OK 73008.

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Hidden Treasures

Photographs by Jim Argo

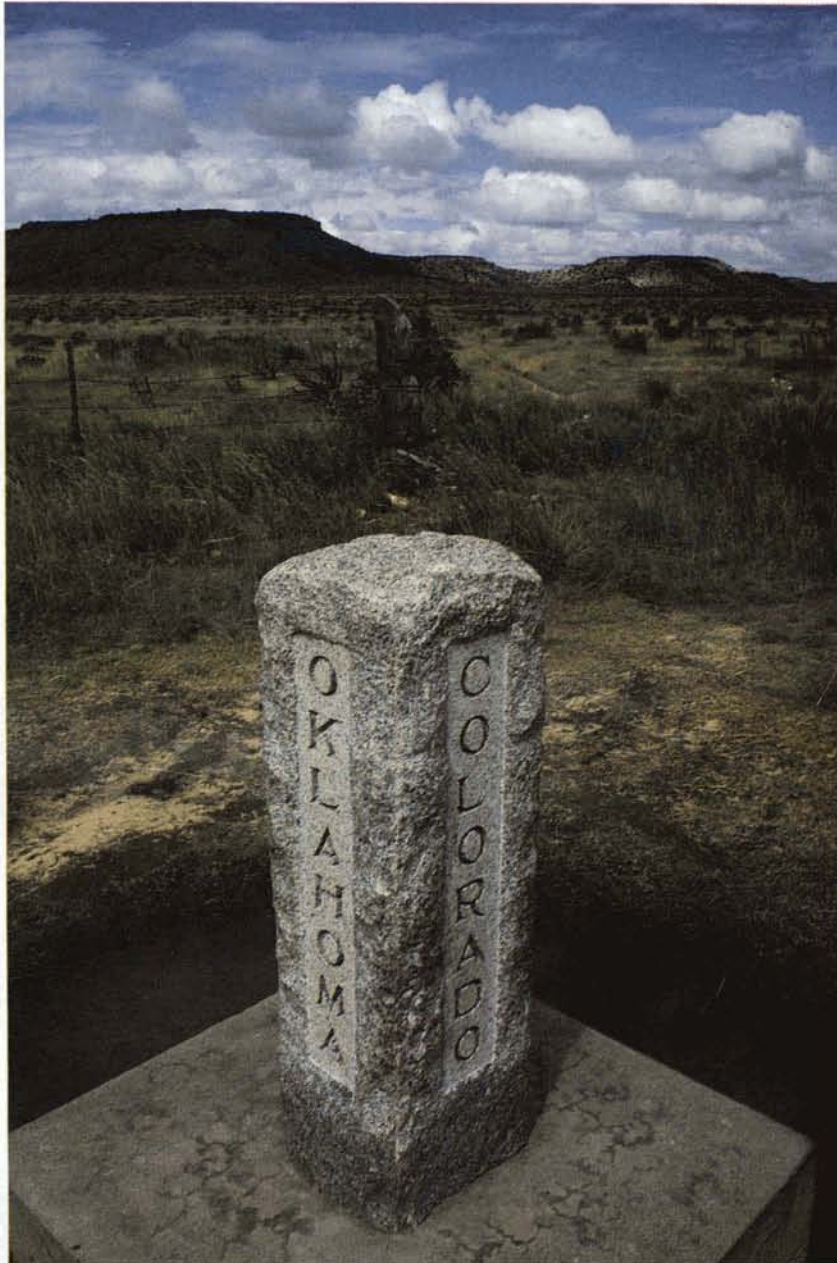
Because his job as a staff photographer for the *Daily Oklahoman* allows Jim Argo to wander hither and yon across our fair state, the blunt-spoken Argo likes to brag that he has the distinction of having been: “On every major highway in Oklahoma.” He’s made the most of the opportunity. Armed with a 1940 WPA guidebook, word-of-mouth tips, and



Wheelock Mission Church, McCurtain County

elaborate maps of every county in the state (complete with churches, schoolhouses, and cemeteries), Argo compiled a list of what he considers to be hidden Oklahoma landmarks. Here, he shares some of his favorites.

If the simple beauty of Wheelock Mission Church didn't catch your attention, its long history would. Here under a nearby oak in 1832, the Rev. Alfred Wright held the first Presbyterian service in what is now Oklahoma. A zealous missionary to the Choctaw (he translated the Bible into the Choctaw language), Wright founded both Wheelock Mission Church and Wheelock Academy (both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places). In 1846, Wheelock Church was built with stones taken from church grounds; 146 years later, it's still standing, its 20-inch-thick, hand-chiseled stone walls having withstood 14 decades of time as well as a fire in 1866. Sunday services are held regularly at the church, which sits 2 miles northeast of Millerton in McCurtain County.



The Three-State Marker, Cimarron County

***I**n the late 1800s, the first Three-State Marker was erected on what was supposedly the spot where Oklahoma meets New Mexico and Colorado. Soon after, however, surveyors realized they'd missed their mark by 300 or 400 feet: The limestone marker was sitting inside Colorado, not on the Oklahoma border. About 1900, they tried again. This survey went a bit better: A modern-day attempt shows the present marker is off only by a few yards. The Three-State Marker is located 8 to 10 miles northwest of Kenton in the Panhandle.*

At 33 feet in length, the Roman Arch Bridge near Newkirk is not long as county road bridges go. Nor at 16 feet in width, is it particularly wide. But to those who have seen it, it is an impressive memorial to two stonemasons who built houses, bridges, and barns of stone in north-central Oklahoma in the early 1900s.

Ernest Armstrong and his father (name unknown) built the Roman Arch Bridge out of local limestone, using cut stones that weighed several tons each. What they built around 1910 has been called by one engineer: "The only true arched masonry bridge with a keystone (top and ceiling cap) similar to that built in ancient Europe that I've ever seen."

After nearly seven decades of use, the bridge, which sits firmly on the natural rock ledge that lines both banks of Deer Creek, is said to be as structurally sound as the day it was completed.

It is one of Jim Argo's big disappointments, however, that an effort by the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1978 failed to get the Roman Arch Bridge listed on the National Register of Historic Places. "It kind of reminds me, in a way, of London Bridge or the Tower Bridge," says Argo, sadly. "It's got that kind of arch in it."



The Roman Arch Bridge, Kay County





Gene Autry General Store, Gene Autry, Carter County

Gene Autry would appear to be a classic example of a rural Oklahoma town: It has a general store, a post office, and about 50 homes. But it lacks the complacency of most small southern towns. Established in the late 1800s, it was first named Lou, for Lou Henderson, a local resident's wife. When it suddenly upped and moved, it appropriately renamed itself, New Lou. New Lou soon became Dresden, after a town in Ireland. Then, the town moved again. And, yes, it got another name: Berwyn, for a town in Pennsylvania. In Berwyn it seemed it had finally found a good fit. By the turn of the century, Berwyn had a bank, a general store, a blacksmith shop, a druggist, three cotton gins, and a choice spot on the Santa Fe line. By 1941, however, the population was 200. Given past successes, who could blame townspeople for thinking a name change was once again in order. That year, Berwyn became Gene Autry, for the famous Oklahoma star of Hollywood westerns. The name change brought the town a lot of national attention (Gene Autry did a live broadcast from downtown), but no more residents. Still locals observe optimistically: "It's rising a little." Gene Autry is located south off S.H. 52. Gene Autry General Store, owned by Jess Shelton, is open seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The son of a Cherokee mother and a white trader father, Sequoyah was a father of three when he became intrigued with the fact that white men could convey messages to each other by writing. In 1821, after twelve years of experimenting, Sequoyah created the Cherokee alphabet.

He became almost instantly famous. Today, his statue stands in the Capitol in Washington, D.C., as one of Oklahoma's two greatest men and the giant redwood trees of California are named for him.

The site of Sequoyah's cabin home is on the National Register of Historic Places; it is also a National Historic Landmark. In 1988, this statue of Sequoyah, sculpted by Fred Olds of Edmond, was dedicated; it had been commissioned to be the showpiece for the site. Says Argo, "What intrigued me about the statue was the research Fred had done. The tobacco pouch, the feathered quill, the little details."

Sequoyah's Home is located 17 miles northeast of Sallisaw on S.H. 101 in Sequoyah County.



Sequoyah Statue, Sequoyah's Home Site, Sequoyah County

A Cotton Candy Kind of Fair

The Hydro Fair is a three-day celebration of family, community, and other simple pleasures.

By Barbara Palmer
Photographs by Allen Russell

As the August sun settles into the western horizon and the blaze from a half dozen mercury vapor lights chases away the twilight, Porter Massey stands, as he has every summer for each of the last 28 years, at the helm of the kiddie ferris wheel at the Hydro Free Fair.

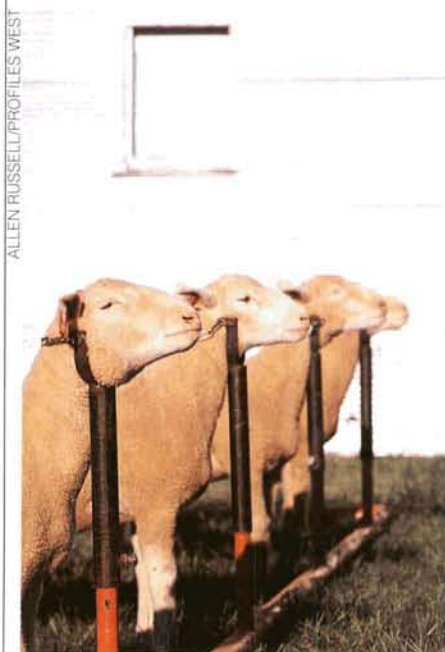
Massey's nephew Warren Miller runs the big ferris wheel, and the pair work side by side, ferris wheel to ferris wheel, clad in striped overalls, cotton shirts, and straw cowboy hats. Men and women who once begged Massey for another turn into the night air now bring their own children, fidgety as grasshoppers, to stand in line.

From 7 p.m., when the midway opens, to midnight when it closes, Porter Massey accommodates customers in the two categories which all children fall into. He's patient with the kids who protest bitterly at the end of the ride ("some, if given the chance, would turn around 'til daylight") and patient with the children who want to get off the moment the steel mesh door closes in front of them. He knows which children might be hard pressed for the fifty cents it costs to buy a ticket and he keeps his eye out for what he calls "hurt" kids. They ride for free.

"Nobody's ever said anything about that," says Massey. "And if they did, I'd

quit. I have to halfway do what I want."

The Hydro fair, now in its eighty-seventh year, is as earnest as a spelling bee and as wholesome as the blush on a peach. The town unfurls its fair traditions every August like Christmas decorations unwrapped from tissue paper. "Everyone's real protective of the traditions," says Joyce Carney, the energetic publisher of a local weekly newspaper. Locals count



Sheep at attention, ready for inspection.

on Massey manning the little ferris wheel, on Aline Kimble bringing a trunkful of cakes for the Saturday night cake auction, and on the Westernettes, a middle-aged, all-female, country-and-western band, playing their heartbroke music from a flatbed truck. The Westernettes have been singing at the fair for ten years, says Carney, and most likely will play for ten more. "They would be *hurt* if they weren't asked."

Hydro's first fair was in September, 1904, when the "Hydro Carnival and Harvest Home Festival" was held on Main Street. In 1925, the fair was moved to City Park, not far from the town's grain elevators.

Farming has always been the fundamental way of life in Hydro. A look in the slim local telephone book will show that families there have deep roots: there are eleven listings under "Entz," including the one for "Entz Farm, Hydro." Wheat, peanut, and cotton are major cash crops and, until a Japanese company bought it out in the early 1980s, a farmer could get his cotton ginned in town.

The fair has always been the preeminent social occasion in Hydro and the surrounding smaller towns of Eakly,

In years past, Porter Massey took the ferris wheel home with him after the fair, and cranked it up on Sunday afternoons.





Hydro residents repainted many of the carousel horses to look like their flesh-and-blood counterparts in local pastures. Bays, sorrels, and palominos sport painted brands on their hindquarters. A tractor motor keeps them all spinning.

Thomas, Colony, and Arapaho. Families plan reunions then, and far-flung classmates meet to marvel at one another's children. For three days, says Carney, "Everybody drops everything."

"No matter if your life is a mess," says a young man leaning over the fence down at the livestock barn, "you still come home to the fair."

Two full pages of fair exhibit categories are published in Carney's newspaper in late July. There are prizes for corn, field peas, chow chow, cotton, cucumbers, and plums. There are more than eighty classes for cattle and fifty classes for sheep. (The sheep listing carries this cryptic warning: "Lambs must have lamb teeth. NO PAINTING.")

There are five categories for quilts, three for crocheted items, and enough kinds of baked goods to fill a bakery window several times over. Judging

from the fair, cakes are of singular importance to Hydro supper tables. In addition to the baking classes, with categories for squash, banana, carrot, white layer, Bundt, angel food, and chocolate cakes, there is a separate cake show and auction on Saturday night.

On Thursday afternoon, the door to the WPA-built exhibit hall holding household arts and agricultural exhibits is locked at 5 p.m. Inside, judges taste, sniff, and study their way along long tables, while much of Hydro waits outside. When the doors reopen, the hall buzzes.

Mennonite women with their hair caught up in buns browse through drifts of quilts, afghans, and hand-hemmed handkerchiefs. Rows of glass jars hold jelly, green beans, beets, pickled okra, and a garden of old pop bottles sprout flowers with old-fashioned names: cockscomb, verbena, lantana, snapdragon.

Tomatoes were in short supply last year, but maize was entered in record numbers—the red and gold bundles covered two tables and overflowed onto the floor. A typographical error increased the premium from \$2.50 to \$25.00. "They've been bringing in maize all day," says an onlooker.

By 9 p.m. on Thursday night, the straw-covered floor in the sheep barn is white with wool. Across the way, cows wait patiently under the nozzles of vacuums and pink pigs are lathered and rinsed, as Hydro students primp the livestock they plan to show on Friday.

Charlie Wieland, owner of Fine Swine Equipment, grew up showing hogs when the arena was the shade of a big mulberry tree. The tree is still there, but a new show building was erected near the livestock barn.

Now Wieland's young children raise hogs and show them at the fair, brush-

ing, feeding, and walking them everyday for months beforehand. The hogs do all right in competition, Wieland says. Winning, clearly, is not everything.

"You can sure tell when a kid has worked with them," he says.

In the 1950s, the Hydro fair board grew alarmed with the quality of traveling carnivals. "They were ratty," recalls Clare Ethel. The Community Club, the local equivalent of the Chamber of Commerce, formed the Hydro Amusement Company to buy rides for its own midway.

Supermarket owner Janey Pease, a Community Club board member and a granddaughter of one of the amusement company organizers, was just a child when the company was formed. During the first few years, Pease says, the rides were homemade. One in particular—swings attached to a revolving pole—stands out in her memory. It went so fast riders swung straight out to the side. "You could stand under (the ride) and be thrown up on."

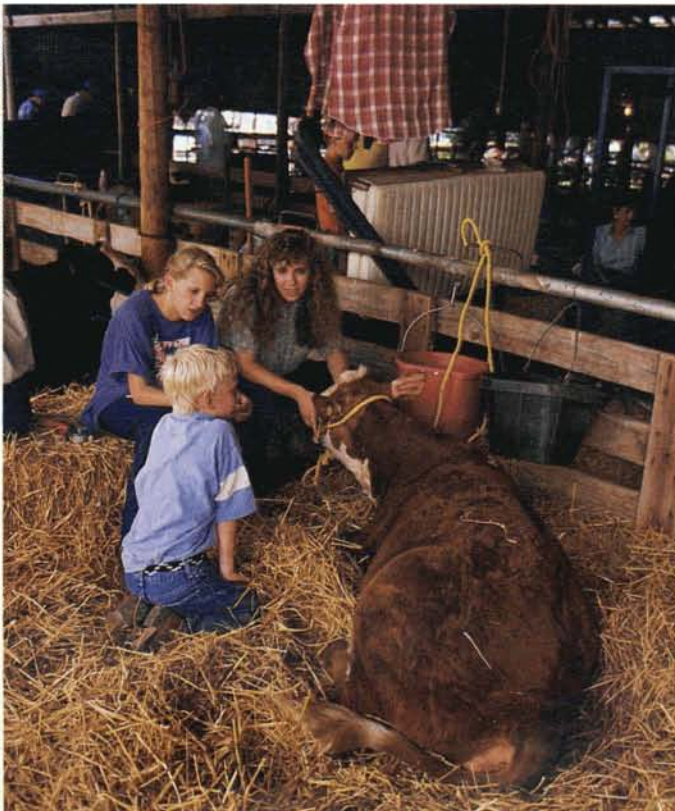
Later, Hydro bought carnival rides from Craterville Park in Lawton after it flooded, including a train, the big and little ferris wheels, and a 1906 carousel with wooden horses. They paid \$3,500 for the merry-go-around—discounted for the fact that it had to be dug out of a muddy field. (Part of the train was retrieved from the bottom of a canyon.)

Each year the Hydro midway—now

grown to nine rides—is scrutinized by the same U.S. Department of Labor inspectors who regulate commercial carnivals. Those old homemade swings, says Pease, wouldn't have stood a chance.

The Amusement Company also put together its own carnival games, hammering together booths and buying used equipment from other carnivals. A fairgoer can toss a ring around a pop bottle, try to pick up a prize with a miniature front-loader, even pound a trigger that springs a rubber frog towards a lily pad. Individuals and businesses operate the same rides, booths, and concessions year after year. Hydro Hardware sells popcorn and snow cones. The Hinton Telephone Company, the Hydro Food Mart, and the Triple S Farms work together running the merry-go-round. Assignments are considered permanent; sometimes, though, a booth goes to a hand-picked successor. "Heck," says a worker at ring toss game, "we even pass along the jokes."

ALLEN RUSSELL/PROFILES WEST



Backstage in the livestock barn the night before judging. Hydro students shampoo, brush, and brush again. Some will stay all night in the barn.

Fairly Great Moments

1810 — The prototype for what would become the modern county fair is first held in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, when Elkanah Watson organizes the "Berkshire Cattle Show." Along with cattle and agricultural products, Watson admits entries of household items, such as quilts and jellies. Though the female population enters their handiwork, they (quite properly, they think) stay away from the show itself. When it comes time to award the ribbons, Watson stops the proceedings until the ladies, including Mrs. Watson, can be sent for.

1874 — The first recorded fair in Oklahoma, the Indian International Fair, is held in Muskogee, Indian Territory. A young horsewoman will make quite a splash at the fair a few years later. Her name: Belle Starr.

1892 — Listed among the 1,001 entries in the premium book for the "Territorial Fair" held in downtown Oklahoma City are oil painting and watercolors.

1898 — Highlights of the 1898 Garfield County Fair in Enid are harness racing, a baseball game, and a fuss about the featured band—it was from another county.

1927 — Rain fell at the Tulsa Fair every single day from 1926 to 1928, except for one day in 1927 when Charles Lindbergh addresses a crowd outside the fair gates on the benefits of commercial aviation. The sun shines on the assembled crowd of 50,000 people.

1928 — The Jersey Bull Jubilee in Bryan County boasts 100 percent participation of the registered Jersey bulls in the county.

circa 1950 — The State Fair in Oklahoma City discontinues agriculture exhibits in open classes. "We found ourselves competing with those beautiful displays at the grocery stores," says retired fair manager Frances Young.

1961 — The Oklahoma State Fair is chosen as the setting for the race horse scene in the MGM movie, "State Fair," starring Pat Boone and Ann Margret.

More Blue Ribbon Fairs

When we started asking around for outstanding, old-fashioned fairs, a geographical pattern emerged. The endurance of old-fashioned fairs seems to be, like red dirt and tumbleweeds, much more likely in the western half of the state.

Though the ferris wheel stands at Tolbert Park in Mountain View year round, there are only two annual occasions when it actually carries passengers: the Fourth of July and the Mountain View/Gotebo Fair.

Mountain View residents, like those in Hydro, began in recent decades to collect their own amusements. In addition to the ferris wheel and exhibit buildings, the park holds a merry-go-round, kiddie cars, and a homemade miniature golf course. Merchants and civic organizations volunteer to run game booths.

High school junior and senior classes run the fair food booths, serving hamburgers, calf fries, steaks, catfish, and homemade ice cream. The profits go to fund the senior class trip. Apparently the booths do a brisk business: the senior class headed to Cancun this summer.

Fair dates this year are July 31-August 3. Entertainment begins nightly at 7 p.m. For information, call the fair superintendent, Leon Hobbs, at (405) 347-2231.

For most farm families in Woods County in northwestern Oklahoma, the county fair, held in late August in Alva, signals the end of sixteen-hour days. It's the first break they have all summer, says county home economist Karen Armbruster. "The county fair is the time they start to unwind."

It's ironic, then, that among the main attractions at the fair are demonstrations of 1920's-era wheat threshing and hay-baling. The chores are performed with pre-1952 antique and classic tractors, provided by the members of the local Antique Tractor Club. One star is a kerosene-powered 1910 tractor, used along with a steam-powered thresher (or "thrasher" in the local vernacular). Club members also compete in a tractor pull in the fairground's arena.

Along with the old tractors, the Woods County Fair offers a full plate of homespun diversions: a quilt display, pie contest, stock show, and home and agricultural exhibits. The Fair Kitchen, staffed by local cooks, serves hot meals and home-baked desserts, including their specialty, chicken and home-made noodles.

The fair is scheduled this year August 26-28. For more information call the county extension office at (405) 327-2786.

—Barbara Palmer

The fair's high point comes on Saturday night at the cake show and auction. Since late afternoon, men and women and schoolchildren have been bringing their creations to the exhibit hall: dark and light butter cakes, chiffon cakes, Italian cream cakes, and coconut-capped variations of the Hydro favorite, German chocolate. By dusk, the judges have made their decisions and secretly pinned on blue and red ribbons.

By 7:30, the Westernettes have warmed up the crowd and anticipation runs along the rows of assembled lawn chairs. Auctioneer Roger Entz is assisted by a pair of "ringmen," who cruise the crowd looking for signs of interest and latent rivalries.

Once the bidding begins, you dare not lift your hand, even to scratch your nose. "Out of town people are just amazed," says cake auction chairman Edith Entz. "They come to the auction thinking they *might* like to buy a cake."

It soon becomes clear there's more at stake here than moist devil's food with buttercream icing. There is no better

way for a Hydro merchant—or a politician running for reelection—to demonstrate good will than to outbid a rival at the Hydro cake auction. If it's an election year, candidates for the county commission are sure to make their bids loudly, calling their names out and challenging opponents. Husband and wife Alvin and Thelma Davis are known for trying to outbid one another. And the Hydro Co-op is sure to buy several cakes and then invite the whole town to stop by for cake and coffee on Monday morning. The high bid last year was \$450, paid for a German chocolate cake baked by Shirley Miller. Nelson Unruh paid \$250 for a cake baked by his 13-year-old granddaughter. In all, the nineteen cakes auctioned off last year brought in \$5,635.

All of the money earned at the cake auction and the midway goes directly back into a fund to provide premiums, stuffed animals, gasoline for the rides, and a hundred other things for next year's fair. "Nobody wants anything for themselves out of it," says Joyce Carney. "No one gets back a percentage, no one

is real competitive. No one has anything to gain from it, except the town as a whole.

"And that's what keeps the town going."

"Gee," adds Edith Entz. "This is the way it's always been."

Barbara Palmer is associate editor of Oklahoma Today. Photographer Allen Russell has family ties in Hydro.



Getting There

The 87th annual Hydro Free Fair will be held August 15-17. Hydro (pop. 900) sits 45 miles west of Oklahoma City on Route 66. From I-40, take S.H. 58 to the north and travel west on Third Street to City Park.

To receive a copy of the fair schedule, send a self-addressed envelope to Joyce Carney, Country Connection, P.O. Box 206, Eakly, OK 73033, after August 1.



Lessons from the Watermelon Patch

Ice them down, slice them up, but lose the thump.

They've been called edible jugs of 97 percent H-2-O. To Terral teenagers, they're a necessary summer pain—hoing and hauling them in southern Oklahoma's dripping humidity across sandy river bottoms remains the only way to earn much needed gas money. For those over 21 years, they are the perfect self-contained, mixed drink, because vodka and EverClear, liberally applied, spice up the subtle, sweet taste of the pink meat.

The "World Book" calls them, technically, gourds. But to farmers in Terral, they represent cold cash.

Watermelons, especially during the harvest months of June, July, and August, are the lifeblood of this tiny Jefferson County town (population 640). The crop came to Terral on the heels of the Rock Island Railroad in the last years of the last century, according to resident Ida Mae Peterson, and it stayed. By the 1930s, Peterson's husband, Willis, was paying his field hands "\$1.50 a day and their dinner" to harvest the weighty jugs.

In 1991, it is safe to say that watermelons are a way of life here. Depending on the weather, anywhere from 12 million to 20 million pounds of watermelons are grown in Terral each year, about 12,000 to 15,000 pounds per acre. Virtually all those melons go out of state. Over time, the number of growers in the area has declined, but higher per-acre yields have compen-

sated for it. Cattle, wheat, and cotton command more acres here, but the sheer number of watermelons produced has made the crop Terral's main claim to fame.

In 1965, Terral introduced the Terral Watermelon Jubilee. "The Lions Club started it," explains resident Myra Hamm. "It was mainly to let everybody know Terral had watermelons and that Terral was the place to get them. We still have to do battle with Rush Springs over who has the best melons. Acreage-wise, we have many times what they have."

Myra Hamm speaks with authority. Locally, she is the resident expert on the phenomenon that in recent years has allowed Terral to give Rush Springs, a watermelon bastion some 55 miles to the north in Grady County, a run for its money. Her resume may read

32-year-old, special-education teacher, but Myra Hamm has been in the melon business for years: First as a farmer's daughter, driver, and harvest crew leader, now as a farmer's wife and all-around hand.

As publicity chairman for the community's annual jubilee (not a "festival," she stresses, Rush Springs has the "festival"), Myra Hamm finds herself ringing up a lot of big-city media types trying to get them excited about watermelon. In one instance, when a reporter's trip to Terral seemed doomed because the town has no motel, Myra Hamm, in classic Terral style, offered her home instead. In 1990, her

daughter, Shelby, at age 4, was crowned Little Miss Watermelon Queen. Yes, Myra Hamm knows both the glamour and the drudgery of farming watermelons.

The latter tends to dominate.

Few things in this world are hotter than the sandy loam along the Red River in the middle of summer. The heat and humidity, even with frequent trips to the water jug and mouthfuls of melon, can wear a body out. "Oh, it's hot, hot, hot," bemoans Hamm. "It's usually triple-digit, anywhere from 100 to 112."

The mechanization of farming has improved the melon farmer's lot, but all the herbicides in the world won't keep away weeds that can choke the life and profit out of fledgling watermelon plants. Somebody has to hoe the melon field regularly for weeks before harvest.



Harvested melons weigh in anywhere between 20-30 pounds. The high spirits of workers at Terral's Red River Farms don't last much beyond high noon.

And there's still only one way to harvest the fruit: Somebody has to pick the green jugs up off the ground and carry or toss them to someone else to stack on a truck. "In the mornings, you're always cussin' and discussin'. 'You didn't throw that melon right.' 'Don't mash my finger.' But if you get out there in the afternoon, in the heat of the day, there's not a lot of cutting up," Hamm says. "You run over the gourds and sunflowers (in the fence line) when you're turning the next row, and you sneeze. And you run over rotten watermelons or cantaloupes in the heat of the day, (and) it just stinks."

But there is another side: "You find a bird's nest with little baby birds, or baby rabbits. You might see a hawk making dive bombs and coming up with a screaming rabbit...Occasionally, Rex (the Hamms' 8-year-old black Chow) will scare up a coyote or something," says Hamm.

The melons picked, it falls to Olen Weatherly, a watermelon broker, to get them on their way after a stopover at his scales for weighing, inspection, and boxing. Weatherly's doors open at 6:30 a.m. "It's work. Hard work," Weatherly says. "We'll have two or three phones ringing at the same time and half a dozen truck drivers talking to you at the same time. We try to quit at 10 o'clock, but some nights we'll stay till midnight or one o'clock. We've got a man that sits up there and examines each one of them watermelons to see that they're what they're supposed to be."

What that is is not open for debate. Fine Jubilees should be green-striped with red flesh and black seeds, oblong, and weigh 25-45 pounds. Allsweets, green-striped with red flesh and small brown seeds, oblong, and 25-40 pounds. Crimson Sweets, green-striped with red flesh, dark brown, mottled seeds, round or oblong, and 20 to 30

pounds. There are a few Black Diamonds (green, round, 30-50 pounds, with red flesh, and black seeds) to be found, but that's Rush Springs' claim to fame. (A few farmers have tried the new "seedless" varieties, but so far the models are more expensive to plant and they also take some of the sport out of eating watermelon.)

If a watermelon looks like it's supposed to, with no visible flaws, there's only one way to tell if it's a good one:

Cut into it. "I get a real kick out of watching people come along and thump 'em and shake 'em," Myra Hamm confides. "You can lay out three watermelons from three different fields, but I

can't tell you that this one's going to taste sweeter than that one. My sister-in-law sent me this little deal out of a gadget catalog. It's this meter, a 'thing of the future.' It looked like you just set it on there and it was going to tell how sweet it was and how ripe it was by water content. I didn't save the article."

Says Hamm, "My papa taught me this a long time ago. When you're bringing your crop in and it's not sold (yet), down here on Main Street is Watermelon Alley. Instead of turning (into the scales), you drive the whole length of Watermelon Alley so everybody can see 'em. You drive real slow. If you can stop and talk to somebody that's even better. And you've got to have 'em stacked real pretty. You never let a belly show. That is Sin No. 1."

Sin No. 2: "You never cut a watermelon in front of a customer unless you're damn sure it's ripe. Papa never hesitated to cut 'em. But he told me, 'You never cut one.'"

"I was never able to tell."

—Richard Mize

Richard Mize is Texas agribusiness editor at the Wichita Falls Times Record News.

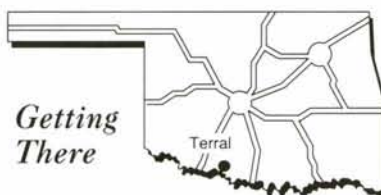
WATERMELON RIND PICKLE

- 1 medium melon
- 3 1/2 pounds sugar
- 1 pint vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon oil of cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon oil of cinnamon

Cut off green and pink parts of rind. Cube. Cover with hot water. Boil 8 minutes until tender. Drain. Combine sugar, oils, and vinegar for syrup. Bring syrup to a boil. Pour over rind. Let stand overnight. Reclaim syrup, then heat syrup for two mornings, each day pouring hot syrup over rind. On the third morning, heat syrup, pour over rind, and then pack rind and syrup in jars and seal.

For a crisp pickle, first soak rind overnight in lime water (1/2 bottle slaked lime to 1/2 gallon water) before beginning recipe. Remember to rinse very well if using lime.

*Texas-Oklahoma Watermelon Association



The 26th annual Terral Watermelon Jubilee will be Saturday, July 27, in downtown Terral. Area melon growers give away free, ice-cold watermelon to all comers beginning at 1 p.m.

Festivities begin at 10 a.m. with a parade; afterwards, barbecue goes on sale at the Community Center. Other Jubilee draws: an arts and crafts show, an old-fashioned horse race, a mule-jumping contest (with both large and small mule divisions), a fun run, and live country-western and gospel music.

Terral sits a mile north of the Red River on U.S. 81 in Jefferson County. "If you get to the Red River bridge, you've missed the town," says Myra Hamm. On the way back stop for fish at Doug's Drive Inn, between Terral and the river, she suggests. The restaurant really isn't a drive-in; in fact, Hamm says local folks call it the Peach Orchard.

For more information about the Jubilee, call Hamm at (405) 437-2402. Or write Gerald and Alpha Hall, Route 1, Box 27, Ryan 73565.



Prairie Song, I.T.

Remaking the old days in Indian Territory.

It wasn't meant to be anything more than a Sunday hideaway, a place just far enough away from their ranch house that the trill of the telephone could be escaped. It was to be a solitary log cabin, recalls Marilyn Moore Tate, where the newly married couple could sit, prop their feet on a wooden rail, and revel in the wild beauty of their 1,400-acre ranch in the rugged bluestem country of northeastern Oklahoma.

But somehow things got out of hand.

Seven years later, Marilyn and Kenneth Tate have yet to spend a night in their "honeymoon cabin." On the other hand, the cabin now sits with 12 other hand-built structures on a

grassy hill that overlooks Hogshooter Creek, so named because an Osage who lived by the creek one day shot a wild hog as it attacked a white settler's son. (The Indian became "Hogshooter"; the creek "Hogshooter Creek.")

The place the Tates built is called: Prairie Song, Indian Territory. It looks like an 1890's Oklahoma pioneer town. Marilyn Tate can't pinpoint the moment plans changed from building a private getaway for two to building a town for others, but she thinks it can be traced to the couple's insatiable thirst for authenticity. A case in point: her husband, Kenneth, once bought a herd of Texas longhorn cattle simply for historic purposes—the breed once roamed this part of Oklahoma. "My husband says, 'If it can't be done au-

thentically, then you don't do it,' " Marilyn explains. "He's so much that way that sometimes I'm ready to pinch his head off."

Once the Tates had reassembled the log cabin (they bought it from Silver

Song every single year.

In 1984, he finished the frontier-style barn for his collection of antique tractors and had enough logs leftover to build something else. He chose to build a chapel in a grove of post oak trees east of the cabin. He made pews from nine types of trees—among them cherry, oak, pecan, walnut—that grew along Hogshooter Creek. He installed European stained-glass windows that Marilyn had rescued from an old mission church near Dewey. And he carved a pulpit from an old cedar tree—143 rings round—that had been uprooted in a big summer storm.

In the end, what Kenneth Tate built was the realization of another's

dream. Marilyn's mother, the late Leona Moore, had always envisioned, and never gotten, a little chapel on the ranch where Christian cowboys could go to pray on Sunday mornings. When Kenneth's was completed, Marilyn named it "The Wildwood Chapel," and she dedicated it to "the women of the Horseshoe L Ranch."

Today, it is her own safe haven. Marilyn Tate has the energy of a geyser. But when that natural energy begins to ebb, it is to the chapel that she goes for renewal. A few minutes of solitude, or a few songs on the player piano, and Marilyn Tate is ready to face the world again. "The little chapel is magic," she promises. "Hundreds and hundreds of people by now have seen it, and, time after time, I've seen them

FRED W. MARVEL



Marilyn's grandmother was a Scudder, and this schoolhouse closely resembles the Scudder family school that graced her uncle's nearby pasture.

Dollar City in Branson, Missouri), they wanted to furnish it as much as possible like it would have been in 1894 when Marilyn's Iowa-born grandfather came to the area to become a cowboy. Unfortunately, a fire at the old Moore Ranch had destroyed most of the heirlooms collected through the years by Marilyn's mother, Leona Moore.

In hindsight, Marilyn thinks this is when she lost control of the project. While she commenced locating the appropriate copper chandeliers and oak furnishings to go with the cabin's hand-hewn log walls, stained-glass windows, and hand-carved doors, Kenneth commenced to building himself a barn to pass the time while she was away.

Since then, Kenneth Tate has built at least one new building for Prairie

come in as if the world was heavy on their shoulders and I've seen them leave with hope."

The chapel was completed in 1985. That year a woman from an Oklahoma City tour company was visiting in Bartlesville when her hosts ran out of sights to show her. Someone remembered the building going on at the 'Tates' and telephoned to ask if they could bring the woman out to see it. Marilyn's answer: Certainly.

The big-city tour guide took one look at the quaint cabin, the big barn, and the comely chapel set against a backdrop of a working ranch and asked if she could bring a bus of English farmers to visit. "I said, 'yes,' of course," Marilyn recalls, "not knowing any more than a goose what you're supposed to do with such a group."

The visit went well. However, "I still didn't know what we had here," admits Marilyn. Then, businessmen began mentioning the need for liability insurance, and, maybe more importantly, someone else upped and asked Kenneth: "My gosh, you've got a cabin and a barn and a church—where is the school?"

"It's dangerous around my husband to say such things," says Marilyn. "Every time someone says, 'Golly why don't you have such and such,' he's gone. He's gone. He just puts the last peg in on one and starts on another."

Prairie Song, I.T., was officially born.

On the heels of the chapel came the school, followed by an outhouse, a wash house, a tool shed (stuffed like a bell pepper with antique tools), a blacksmith's shop, a mule shed ("no mule yet, but I'm getting one"), and, finally, a covered bridge over Sippinwolf Creek. By 1989, the couple had built a trading post, so they could sell the Oklahoma gifts foreign visitors kept requesting. "And then," says Marilyn, in all seriousness, "came the big push."

In 1990, the couple added rock tables and benches and a great big stage near the barn. They built a large saloon, so they could bring big crowds in during

storms, and they were given an old post office and enough land documents to justify a post office doubling as a land office. After much searching, they also found a jailhouse, and this summer the finishing touches were put on hand-cut sandstone paths and a line shack like the one Marilyn's grandfather Sherman Moore used to use as a young cowboy working the Kansas-Indian Territory line.

Marilyn and Kenneth Tate don't see the building stopping anytime soon. "We're past the point of no return," says Marilyn.

—Betty Stephenson

Getting There



Prairie Song is five-and-one-half miles east of Dewey on Durham Road. It is open by appointment March through December, weather permitting. Admission is generally \$4, according to what's going on. Dulcimer Days, a weekend of traditional music and crafts, will be July 19-21 this year. For more information, call (918) 534-2662.

Stick Around: More things to see in Bartlesville

Bartlesville is one of those rare towns where good lodging, good food, and good diversions all come together in one place. The worldly executives who fly into town to do business are responsible for the existence of a small first-rate hotel in Bartlesville. The Hotel Phillips, 821 Johnstone, has a concierge, gourmet dining, and other amenities not usually found in a town of 34,000. For information, call (918) 336-5600.

The White Swan Bed and Breakfast offers two rooms in a restored 1906 Victorian house near downtown, a full breakfast, and unlimited time in the porch swing. For reservations, call (918) 336-3519.

Marie's Steak House has been a local institution since the original Marie opened it in the 1930s, when it was illegal to drink in Oklahoma. "It's been burned down, flooded, and raided more times that you can imagine," said a waitress. It's left its checkered past behind and now steaks, seafood, and chicken are served to a law-abiding clientele. For details, call (918) 333-8700.

Among the sights in the area:

- **Woolaroc**, a 3,500-acre wildlife preserve and museum that includes the late Frank Phillips' 1925 pine log lodge. Woolaroc (WOODs, LAKes, and ROCKs) sits 14 miles southwest of Bartlesville on Highway 123. Wild buffalo, deer, and elk roam the grounds. An

authentic stagecoach sits alongside the works of some of America's greatest artists. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Mondays. Admission is \$2 for those 16 years and older.

- **Keepsake Candle Factory** turns elegant Victorian cut glassware, vases, and bowls into antique wax works of art. The factory, located 2 miles west of Bartlesville off U.S. 60, runs tours Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- **Price Tower**, a Frank Lloyd Wright building, houses a museum that features traveling art, history, and science exhibitions. Located at 6th and Dewey, its hours are: Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sunday, 1-4 p.m. Admission is free.

- The restored **Dewey Hotel**, circa 1900, is one of the oldest buildings in Washington County; in its rooms stayed many of those responsible for the early economic and social history of both Dewey and Bartlesville. Fortunes made in oil often were quickly lost in the hotel tower's gaming rooms. Admission \$1.

- The **Tom Mix Museum**, across the street from the Dewey Hotel in Dewey, houses memorabilia of the silent movie screen's first "King of the Cowboys." Mix's old movie "serials" are screened in the small theater. Free admission. Hours are Tuesday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, 2-5 p.m.

—Betty Stephenson

Down Home with the Blues

At the crossroads, D.C. Minner came on back home.

DC. Minner has a little decal on his well-traveled electric guitar that says "Almost Famous." This is not a statement of bitterness from a man who failed to get the classic "Big Break."

D.C.'s stories aren't about regrets.

And the decal's description is as relative as fame is. D.C. may be almost famous compared with some of the famous musicians he has played with. Along the circuit he and his wife, Selby, have played for years, his name is well known in some clubs. More importantly, D.C. Minner is certainly famous in the McIntosh County town of Rentiesville, where he was born and where he is now proprietor, cook, and band leader for the Down Home Blues Club.

Though D.C. and Selby take their "blues on the move" for the first few months of each year ("traveling helps develop your style," says D.C.), they spend the rest of the year in Oklahoma, in Rentiesville, at their club, playing into the very wee hours of weekend mornings. D.C., who is 56, opened the club in 1988 in the building he grew up in, the same building in which his grandmother operated a roadhouse for more than thirty years. "It started out as a speakeasy," Minner said.

"She got a beer license and turned it into a bar during World War II. All the black soldiers from Camp Gruber would come down here."

Lura's Cozy Corner, as his grandmother's place was called, occupied only a narrow strip of

what has become D.C.'s club. Back then, his grandmother's house adjoined the bar. D.C. was born in that house, right next to where the stage now sits.

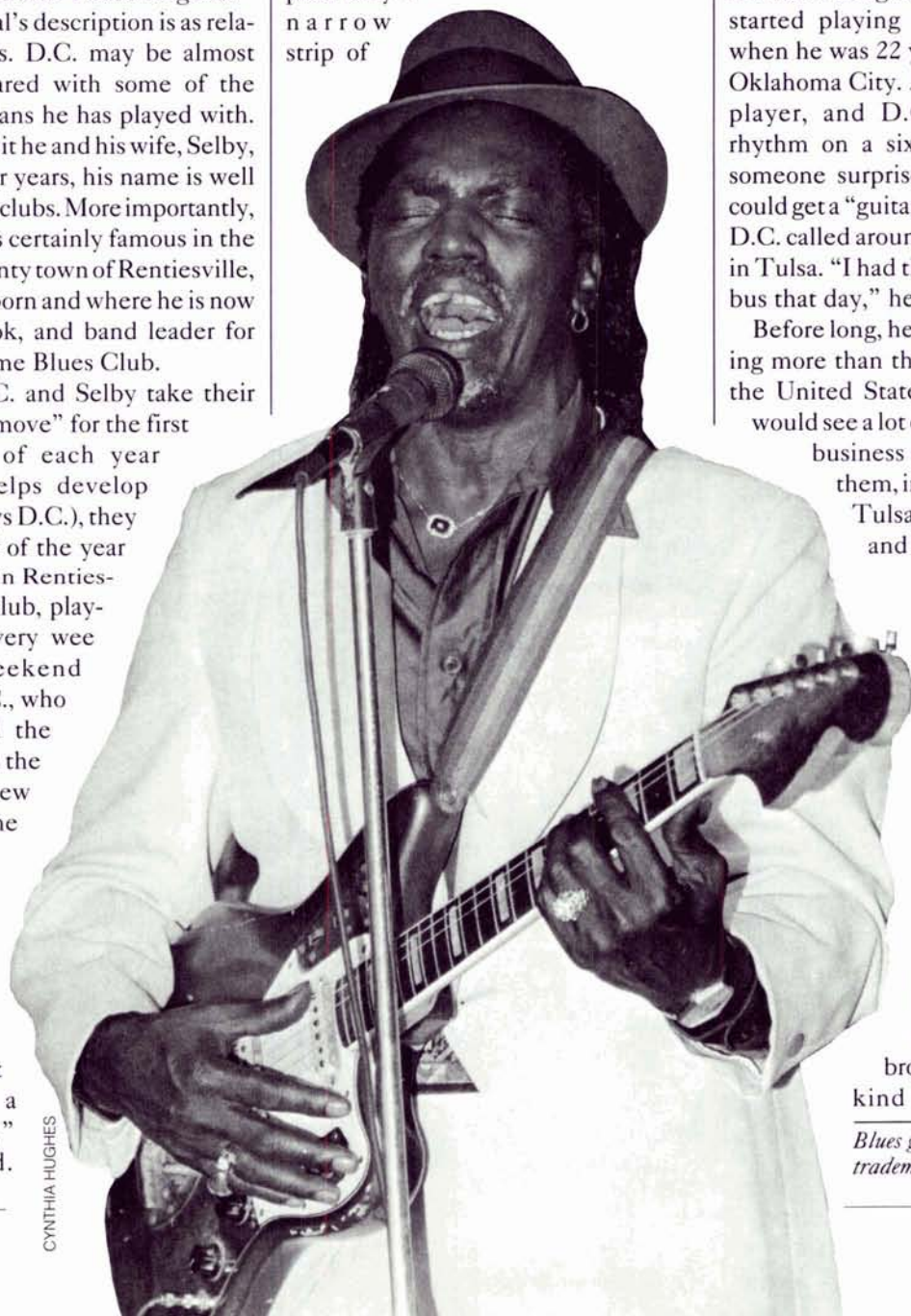
The first live music D.C. heard came from the musicians who played for drinks in his grandmother's place. He started playing music professionally when he was 22 years old and living in Oklahoma City. A band needed a bass player, and D.C. obliged, playing rhythm on a six-string guitar. When someone surprised him by saying he could get a "guitar that had four strings," D.C. called around until he located one in Tulsa. "I had them send it down on a bus that day," he recalled.

Before long, he was on the road, starting more than thirty years of traveling the United States playing music. He would see a lot of the big names in the

business and play with some of them, including Chuck Berry, Tulsa-born Lowell Fulson, and the man he claims in-

fluenced him the most: blues guitarist Freddie King. King was born in Texas and moved to Chicago as a teenager, and he forged a unique sound by combining rural and urban blues' styles. It is a fusion adopted by many modern blues players—including white musicians who helped take it to a broader audience. It is the kind of music that now

Blues guitarist D.C. Minner in his trademark fedora.



CYNTHIA HUGHES

comes out of an electric guitar on weekend nights in rural Rentiesville.

How D.C. came to return home with his music seems as natural as the aging process. Through the years, he often passed through Oklahoma on the way to other gigs. If he had a show in Oklahoma City or Tulsa, he would have the band drop him off as close to Checotah as possible and hitch the rest of the way into Rentiesville to see his family.

In 1969, his grandmother died, leaving him the question of what to do with the old roadhouse. "I rented it out as a house for a while," D.C. said. "But I never would let anybody else run a business in it."

Meanwhile, D.C. entered the new decade playing California gigs. He met Selby in Berkeley, while she was playing in a club there. When the two teamed up, she played bass, he went to lead guitar, and they dubbed themselves "D.C. Minner and Blues on the Move with Selby." Both of them sing, and when they can find one, they pick up a drummer to back them.

The couple returned to Rentiesville two years ago planning to stay just for a few weeks before going to Europe to look for some new venues. Then D.C. and Selby started fixing this and that around the place and finding more excuses to stay. And they stayed. And they plan to stay most of the year from now on. "I'm not getting any younger," explained D.C. "I need to kind of come home." Selby says the people of Rentiesville are glad they've opened the club and were not surprised that they did. Considering the history of the place and their line of work, "It's a natural," she said.

Rentiesville (population 78) was once a black township, most famous for being the site of the largest Civil War battle fought in what is now Oklahoma, the Battle of Honey Springs—the first Civil War battle in which organized units of blacks and whites fought side by side. Since D.C. and Selby took up residence in Rentiesville, they have begun to fight the battles of modern-day community leaders. Ironically, D.C.

is black; Selby, white. The two spent a year organizing a volunteer fire department in Rentiesville, and D.C. was elected to the town council, after declining a request to run for mayor. "You can't run a place like this without taking something out, so you've got to put something back in," D.C. reasons.

A "place like this" is, in the case of the Down Home Blues Club, basically, a bar, one that you have to be looking for as you approach it on the road, despite the fact a recent addition doubled its size. It is neither long nor wide and if there is anything consistent about its decor, it is its random assortment of things. Strings of Christmas lights line the ceiling; a large American flag covers a back wall of the stage. Album covers—from Eric Clapton to Big Mama Thornton and Pigmeat Markham—blanket the walls. Four dollars and two quarters buys a plate of barbecue. Three dollars gets you in to listen until closing time. Starting time is billed as 10 p.m. but on some nights it could be later, depending on when the audience shows up.

Closing time at the bar—2 a.m.—means opening time for some 300 card-carrying club members, who come in through a side door for music that, according to Selby, has lasted sometimes until 5 a.m.

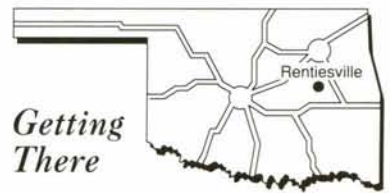
The song list at the club includes such blues standards as "The Thrill is Gone," and "Further On Up the Road," but there are surprises—"Blue Eyes Cryin' in the Rain," "California Dreamin'," and some songs done by Janis Joplin, a favorite of Selby.

The blues, observes D.C., is "a dying art."

Once you commit to it, however, it's a lifetime gig. "I could show you three chords—the structure of the blues—in 45 minutes," D.C. says. "But it will take the rest of your life to master it."

—Chris Casteel

Chris Casteel is a Washington, D.C., bureau reporter for The Daily Oklahoman.



Getting There

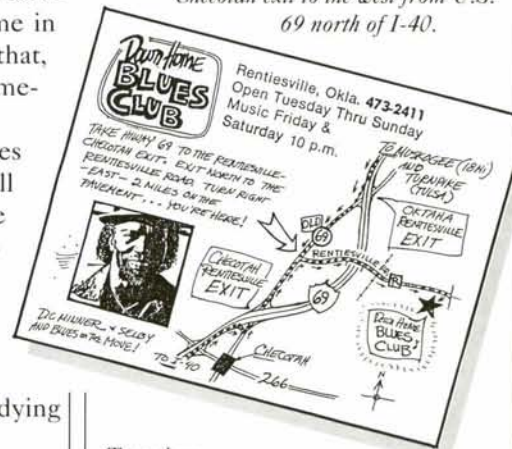
The Down Home Blues Club in Rentiesville is open on Friday and Saturday nights from St. Patrick's Day to New Year's Eve.

The band doesn't begin playing until 10 or 11 p.m., but the club opens around four in the afternoon for barbecue, hot links, and blues standards on the juke box.

And though the joint jumps all night, the audience stays well behaved. It's even against the rules to cuss, says Selby. A security guard stays on the premises, and if anyone causes any trouble, out they go.

Customers drive over from Oklahoma City and Tulsa every weekend, and from campgrounds and resorts at Lake Eufaula during the summer season. There are motels available in nearby Checotah and Muskogee, including two bed and breakfast inns—The Graham Carroll House and The Queen's House—in Muskogee.

To get to the club, take the Rentiesville-Checotah exit to the west from U.S. 69 north of I-40.



Travel on Business 69 north for one mile to the Rentiesville-Honey Springs Road. Turn back east and travel two miles to the club.

The club's telephone number is (918) 473-2411.

"Selby and Blues on the Move" starring D.C. Minner will also perform Saturday, July 6, at Eufaula's Firecracker Festival.

ENTERTAINMENT CALENDAR

♦ P R I M E T I M E S ♦

♦ **July 4-6** The first Quapaw powwows were held at Beaver Springs along the Spring River in northeast Oklahoma in the 1880s. A hundred years later, the gathering's reputation for hospitality is still strong. Along with dancing, arts and crafts and traditional food are the stars. ♦ **July 12-13** The Firehouse Art Center in Norman celebrates the longer days of summer with a Midsummer Night's Fair, two evenings of art, music, theater, homemade ice cream, and other treats. Spotty entrants in the "Dalmation Contest" add to the ambience. ♦ **August 1-4** The Lincoln Plaza will be covered with four hundred quilts during the Central OK Quilters Guild biennial blockbuster show, "A Celebration of Quilts," in OKC. Workshops and a style show are on the agenda. ♦ **August 22-24** The sole remaining performer from the famed 101 Ranch Wild West Show, 95-year-old trick roper Mike Sokoll, spins magic at the 101 Ranch Rodeo in Ponca City.



MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

JULY

- 1-31 Israel Gaujardo, Plains Indians and Pioneers Museum, Woodward, (405) 256-6136
- 1-31 "Full Circle," Native American Art, The Jacobson Foundation, Norman, (405) 366-1667
- 1-Aug. 18 "Robert M. Mengel: A Life With Birds," OK Museum of Natural History, Norman, (405) 325-4711
- 1-Aug. 30 Hogan Memorial Art, Goddard Center, Ardmore, (405) 226-0909
- 1-Sept. 1 "Art That Works: The Decorative Arts in the Eighties," Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, (918) 749-7941
- 1-Sept. 15 "Tough on Livestock," Woolaroc, Bartlesville, (918) 336-0307
- 2-16 "Lest We Forget...a Salute to our Soldiers," Seminole Nation Museum, Wewoka, (405) 257-5580
- 2-Sept. 27 "Fading Glory: Vestiges of Small Town Jewish Life in the American South," Fenster Museum of Jewish Art, Tulsa, (918) 583-3732
- 6-Aug. 26 "Joanne Schiavonne: Book Arts and Screens," Firehouse Art Center, Norman, (405) 329-4523

- 12-Aug. 19 Nick Kyle, Kirkpatrick Galleries, OKC, (405) 427-5461
- 21-Aug. 31 Barking Waters Indian Art Show, Seminole Nation Museum, Wewoka, (405) 257-5580
- 28-Aug. 18 Impressionist Art Show by OK Society of Impressionists, Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 29-Aug. 31 "Lawton's Lottery for Land: Historical Photographs," Museum of the Great Plains, Lawton, (405) 581-3460

AUGUST

- 1-31 Bob Rea, Plains Indian and Pioneers Museum, Woodward, (405) 256-6136
- 1-31 "Red Earth Portraits" and Comanche Featherwork, Jacobson Foundation, Norman, (405) 366-1667
- 5-27 "The Strong Black Arm: Blacks in the Military, 1866-1948," Cherokee Strip Museum, Perry, (405) 336-2405
- 23-Sept. 30 Robin Starke/Cynthia Rasche Showing, Kirkpatrick Galleries, OKC, (405) 427-5461
- 26-Sept. 18 Gayle Singer, Ceramics, and Maxine Warren, Painting, Gardiner Art Gallery, OSU, Stillwater, (405) 744-9086



JULY

- 1-27 "Psycho Beach Party," Carpenter Square Theater, OKC, (405) 232-6500
- 3-7 "Princess and the Pea," OK Children's Theatre, OKC, (405) 948-6409
- 5-7 "Aesop's Fables," Myriad Gardens, OKC, (405) 232-6500
- 9-20 "Carousel," Lyric Theatre, OKC, (405) 948-6800
- 11-14 "Oliver!" Act II, Ada, (405) 332-7863
- 12-14, 19-21 "You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running," Myriad Gardens, OKC, (405) 343-6500
- 12-21 "Bed Full of Foreigners," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 12-21 "Tom Sawyer," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 12-15, 17-22, 24-28 "Annie," Town and Gown Theatre, Stillwater, (405) 372-9122
- 18-Aug. 11 "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Shakespeare in the Park, Hafer Park, Edmond, (405) 340-1222
- 19-28 "Nonsense," Lawton Community Theatre, Lawton, (405) 355-1600
- 23-Aug. 3 "Me and My Girl," Lyric Theatre, OKC, (405) 948-6800
- 23-Aug. 4 "The Many Adventures of Pooh Bear," OK Children's Theatre, OKC, (405) 948-6409
- 26-28, Aug. 2-4 "The Active Nightmare," Carpenter Square Theater, Myriad Gardens, OKC, (405) 232-6500
- 26-Aug. 4 "Damn Yankees," Heller Theater, Tulsa, (918) 596-7877
- 26-Aug. 11 "Hello Dolly," Theatre Tulsa, Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (918) 596-7111

AUGUST

- 2-11 "Pal Joey," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 5-11 "Steel Magnolias," Red Carpet Community Theatre, Elk City, (405) 225-9815
- 6-17 "Fiddler on the Roof," Lyric Theatre, OKC, (405) 948-6800
- 15-18 "Shakespeare Summer," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 23-Sept. 21 "Les Liaisons Dangereuses," Pollard Theater, Guthrie, (405) 282-2800

MUSIC AND DANCE

JULY

- 3-6 Bluegrass Festival, Cherokee Fiddlers Park, Grove, (918) 786-4272
- 4 American Salute Concert, Veteran's Park, Tulsa, (918) 596-7877
- 9,16,23 Starlight Concert, River West Festival Park, Tulsa, (918) 582-0051
- 11 Fifth Annual Summer Twilight Concert Series, Chandler Park, Tulsa, (918) 596-5990
- 12-21 "A Boy and His Piano," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (918) 596-7111

- 19-21 Dulcimer Days, Prairie Song, Dewey, (918) 534-2662
- 19-21 "Dance Speak," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 23-27 Christopher Glenn, One Man Show, Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 23, 25-28 "Max Morath: Living a Ragtime Life," Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111

AUGUST

- 4 Daniel Shapiro Piano Recital, Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, (800) 364-7111
- 8 Bluegrass Music Festival, Powderhorn Park, Langley, (918) 425-5887
- 5,12,19,26 Concerts in the Park, Will Rogers Park Amphitheater, OKC, (405) 236-1426
- 29 World Series of Fiddling, Powderhorn Park, Langley, (405) 732-3964
- 30-Sept. 1 Western Swing Festival, Cherokee Fiddlers Park, Grove, (918) 786-4272

RODEO AND HORSE EVENTS

JULY

- 2-7 Greater OK Hunter Jumper Show, Lazy E Arena, Guthrie, (405) 282-3004
- 10-11 Nat'l Palomino Youth Congress, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113
- 13-17 Palomino World Show, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113
- 18-20 Junior World Team Roping Competition, Hardy Murphy Coliseum, Ardmore, (405) 223-2541
- 19-21 Sooner Appaloosa Horse Show, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113
- 20-Aug. 4 Horse Racing, Fair Meadows Race Track, Tulsa, (918) 743-7223
- 22-26 Nat'l Junior Saddle Show, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113
- 21-28 Nat'l High School Finals Rodeo, Heart of OK Expo Center, Shawnee, (405) 275-7020
- 25-27 Wrangler Rodeo Days, Rodeo Grounds, Fairview, (405) 227-2527

AUGUST

- 2-3 Clinton Rodeo, Rotary Nance Park, Clinton, (405) 323-3510
- 3-4 Triangle Horse Sale, Heart of OK Expo Center, Shawnee, (405) 273-2818
- 5-10 American Junior Quarter Horse World Finals, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113
- 7-10 Ken Lance Rodeo and Western Heritage Week, Ada, (405) 436-3032
- 8-10 Rodeo, Sallisaw Rodeo Arena, Sallisaw, (918) 775-2558
- 8-10 IPRA Rodeo, Heavener, (918) 653-4303
- 17 OK Paint Horse Club Show, Purcell, (405) 438-1599
- 17-18 OK Appaloosa Horse Show, State Fairgrounds, OKC, (405) 948-6700
- 22-24 101 Ranch Rodeo, Rodeo Grounds, Ponca City, (405) 767-8888
- 22-24 Green Country Rodeo, Bartlesville, (918) 336-7022
- 23-25 Major 10 Head Team Roping, Tumbleweeds Sports Arena, Stillwater, (405) 377-2263
- 24 NE OK Cutting Horse Show, Expo Square, Tulsa,

- (918) 744-1113
- 24-25 Green Country Paint Horse Show, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113
- 28 Will Rogers Memorial Rodeo, Rodeo Arena, Vinita, (918) 256-7133
- 30-31 OK State Prison Rodeo, McAlester, (800) 879-2550
- 30-Sept. 2 OK Palomino Horse Show, Expo Square, Tulsa, (918) 744-1113



FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

JULY

- 4 Huckleberry Festival, Jay, (918) 253-8698
- 5-7 Pioneer Days and Parade, Vian, (918) 773-5691
- 12-13 Annual Midsummer Night's Fair, Firehouse Art Center, Norman, (405) 329-4523
- 18-20 Cookson Jubilee and Fly In, Cookson, (918) 457-5476
- 20 Peach Festival, Stratford, (405) 759-2201
- 27 Watermelon Jubilee, Terral, (405) 437-2402
- 31-Aug. 3 Mountain View / Gorebo Fair, Tolbert Park, Mountain View, (405) 347-2231

AUGUST

- 1-4 Craig Co. Free Fair, Vinita, (918) 256-7133
- 3 Hotdog Festival, McLain Rogers Park, Clinton, (800) 759-1397
- 10 Parade of Boats, Lake Tenkiller, Cookson, (918) 457-4403
- 10 Watermelon Festival, Rush Springs, (405) 476-3277
- 15-17 Hydro Fair, City Park, Hydro, (405) 663-2354
- 26-28 Woods Co. Free Fair, Fairgrounds, Alva, (405) 327-2786
- 26-30 Grady Co. Free Fair, Chickasha, (405) 224-2116
- 31-Sept. 2 Hunt and Webster Fall Arts and Craft Show, Grove, (918) 786-5372



INDIAN EVENTS

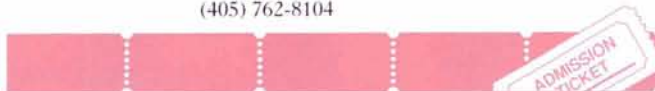
JULY

- 2-4 Kiowa Gourd Clan Ceremonials, City Park, Carnegie, (405) 726-2996
- 4-6 Quapaw Powwow, Beaver Springs Park, Quapaw, (918) 542-1853
- 4-7 Pawnee Indian Veterans Homecoming, Pawnee, (918) 762-3621
- 5-6 Caddo Powwow, Tribal Complex, Binger, (405) 656-2344
- 6-7 NWOK Indian Powwow, Woodward, (405) 256-6136
- 12-14 Sac and Fox Powwow, Stroud, (918) 968-3526
- 12-14 Tonkawa Powwow, Fort Oakland Reserve, Fort Oakland, (405) 628-2561
- 18-21 Otoe-Missouria Encampment, Red Rock, (405) 723-4506

AUGUST

- 2-3 Bell Powwow, Stilwell, (918) 696-5693
- 2-3 All Indian Rodeo, Caddo Co. Fairgrounds, Anadarko, (405) 247-5661
- 2-4 Cheyenne-Arapaho Summer Fest '91 and Powwow, Concho Powwow Grounds, Concho, (405) 262-0345

- 2-4 Kaw Powwow, Kaw Lake, Kaw City, (405) 269-2552
- 2-4 Powwow of Champions, State Fairgrounds, Tulsa, (918) 836-1523
- 3-Sept. 7 Osage Men's Art Exhibition, Osage Tribal Museum, Pawhuska, (918) 287-2495, ext. 279
- 9-11 Tulsa Powwow, Mohawk Park, Tulsa, (918) 241-1922
- 19-24 American Indian Exposition, Caddo Co. Fairgrounds, Anadarko, (405) 247-6651
- 26-Sept. 1 Arts and Crafts, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, (918) 456-6007
- 29-Sept. 1 Cherokee Nat'l Holiday, Cherokee Nation, Tahlequah, (918) 456-3742
- 29-Sept. 1 Ponca Powwow, White Eagle Park, Ponca City, (405) 762-8104



SPECIAL EVENTS

JULY

- 4 Polo Tournament, Mohawk Park, Tulsa, (918) 596-7877
- 4 Quilt Show, Grove Community Center, Grove, (918) 786-5167
- 5-7 Grand Prix Sports Car Races, Lake Ponca, Ponca City, (405) 767-0422
- 13 Flathead Noodling Contest, Grand Lake, Langley, (918) 782-2227
- 13-14 Miniature Aircraft Air Show, Ponca City, (405) 767-3358
- 19-20 Eskimo Joe's Birthday, Stillwater, (405) 377-0799
- 19-21 Balloon Festival, Ada, (405) 332-2506
- 20 Chili Cook-off, Nat'l Cowboy Hall of Fame, OKC, (405) 478-2250
- 20 Civil War Battle of Honey Springs Observance, Checotah, (918) 473-2070
- 21 Ice Cream, Cookies, Croquet, and Lawn Bowling, LaFortune Park, Tulsa, (918) 596-5990
- 26-28 Ardmore's 104th Birthday Celebration, Ardmore, (405) 223-7765
- 27 Red Carpet Country Chili Cook-off, Downtown, Fairview, (405) 227-2527
- 20, 27 Historic Main Street Walking Tours, Ardmore, (405) 226-6246

AUGUST

- 1-4 "A Celebration of Quilts," Lincoln Plaza Conference Center, OKC, (405) 364-5375
- 3-4 Arcadia Lake Regatta, Edmond, (405) 341-2808
- 10-18 Tackle Box Drop, Lake Texoma, Kingston, (405) 564-2334
- 24 Garth Brooks in Concert, Maxwell Convention Center, Tulsa, (918) 596-7177
- 24-25 "Old Alva Days," Fairgrounds, Alva, (405) 327-1647
- 27-28 "Passageway '91 Regatta," Lake Hefner, OKC, (405) 721-1251
- 28 Old Settlers Reunion and Fiddlers Contest, South Park, Vinita, (918) 256-7133
- 29-Sept. 1 Antique Show, Tulsa Convention Center, Tulsa, (800) 678-7177
- 31-Sept. 2 Polo Tournament, Mohawk Park, Tulsa, (918) 596-7877

Although the information in the calendar is current, dates and times can change without notice. Please check in advance before attending any event.

